

LAITY ISSUE

COMMONWEAL

A Review of Religion, Politics, and Culture September 10, 1999

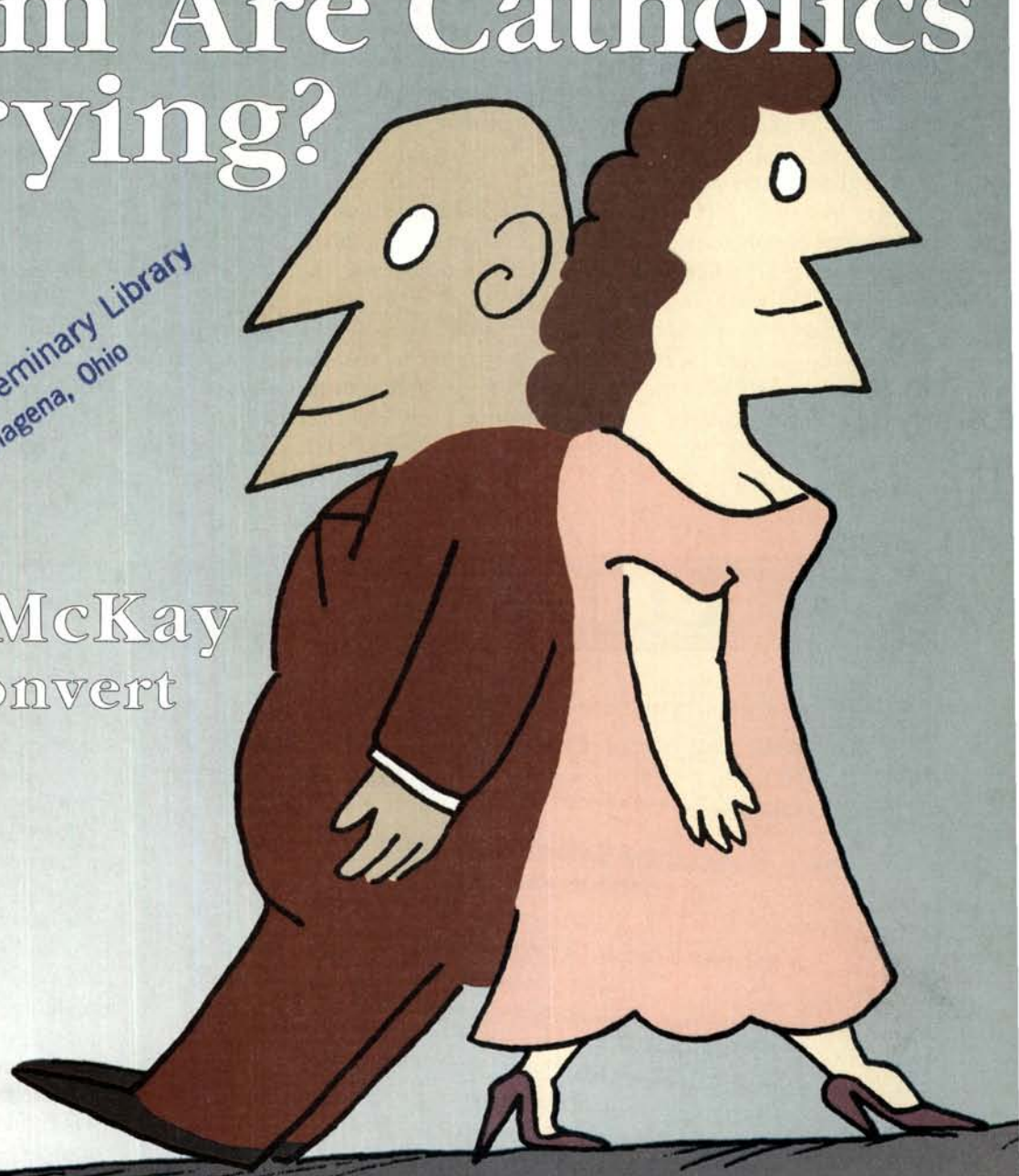
Whom Are Catholics Marrying?

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Davidson

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To the Editors

Mischievous modifiers

I enjoyed Paul Elie's remembrance of Ted Hughes ["A Poet's Unmistakable Voice," July 16], muted though it was, except for this statement: "When he died last October, Ted Hughes was eulogized as one of the only truly great English writers of his time."

One of the only? Not "one of the few" or "one of only three" or (alas) "one of the last"? Mr. Elie is an editor; he should know better—and so should the guy who edited his copy.

Perhaps this corrupt locution comes from too much reading of the *New York Times*. That'll do it every time.

GEORGE MURRAY
Ossining, N.Y.

From the editors: (1) How do you know it was a guy? (2) Only editors are human.

Attila speaks

I'm genetically disposed to right-wing intolerance. I've tried being progressive, but I just can't live a lie; I have to accept who I am. And "who I am" is vicious, mean-spirited, intolerant, insensitive. Further to the right than the hands of a clock at 3:15.

Having said that, I must confess that I enjoy *Commonweal* for its occasional happy insight into that strange and curious thing, the Liberal Catholic Mind.

At least two of those last three words belong within quotation marks, but I shall resist the temptation to commit such crass veracity.

THOMAS DEFREITAS VI
East Boston, Mass.

From the editors: Mr. Defreitas's "tolerance" for *Commonweal* is yet another proof that genes aren't everything.

The future has arrived

From my "re-read this sometime" file, I have retrieved a copy of *Commonweal* dated October 31, 1969, bearing on its cover the title "The Church in the Year 2000." (Also the price: "75 cents.") My motive for keeping it was to see whether any of the authors' observations, made so daringly thirty years ago, would hit the mark in 1999.

I also hoped that I would be alive to see what things would be like in the year 2000!

I have not been disappointed on either account. The editorial, so insightful then, still strikes a chord today. I hope you will provide an opportunity for your readers to revisit this gem, which the editors at the time labeled as an exercise in "futurolgy...whose methods and possibilities are still highly tentative."

PAUL G. CROWLEY
Tucson, Ariz.

75 COMMONWEAL

1999 marks *Commonweal's* 75th year of publication.
We invite you to celebrate with us...in Chicago:

The Crisis of Liberal Catholicism A COMMONWEAL FORUM

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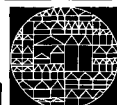
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From the editors: There's a problem here. The contents of that issue (Vol. XCI, No. 5) are too bulky to be quoted, too multifarious to be summarized. We content ourselves, if not Mr. Crowley, with this concluding passage from the editorial:

"Finally, what are targets for future discussions of this sort? Much more attention must be given to the quite specific and concrete political and social events which seem likely in the next thirty years: the growth of the gap between rich and poor; changes in structures of work and leisure; the development of subtle techniques of social control and pressures to apply them to previously private realms of human life; the very 'invention' of futurist planning itself and the type of rationality it implies. The church of the year 2000 may look like that of 1969. If so, looks will be deceiving."

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What Cuba needs

Brian Brown's "Strangling Cuba" [August 13] humanely documents the suffering of the Cuban people during this "Special Period" of their history. Little seems to have changed since I wrote in *Commonweal* of my experiences there a few years back.

But your author is in error when he claims the cause lies with America's economic blockade of the island. Cuba is broke and could not pay for anything if the blockade were lifted tomorrow. When the Russians were Cuba's "sugar daddy," as your author recognizes, life was pretty good on the island even with the blockade in full force. But without Russian support the economy simply imploded.

What Cuba must have in addition to lifting the blockade is American credits to buy what it needs. Anti-Cas-

tro Cuban-Americans and their supporters in Congress would never approve that without significant concessions from Castro (one of which would probably be his retirement) and a reopening of the economy to American (that is, Miamian) influence, thereby undoing everything the revolutionaries fought for.

Clearly, Cuban and American negotiators (and negotiations are going on, don't doubt that for a minute) have reached an impasse on those issues. So simple citizens must live in poverty and shame, seeing their women turn to prostitution and their men trivialized while both governments wait for the other to blink first.

JOSEPH D. POLICANO
East Hampton, N.Y.

No quick fix for Cuba

I agree with Brian Brown that the embargo against Cuba makes no sense,

but my reasons are quite different from his. Yes, the embargo intensifies the myriad evils that plague Cuba (some of which he points out, many of which he doesn't fathom)—hence my firm belief that it should end. But the embargo is hardly the sole cause for the misery of my beloved homeland.

Apart from being immoral, in seventeen years the embargo has not produced its sought-after result. Instead, it has provided the Cuban government with a scapegoat to hide the inefficiencies, mismanagement, and corruption of a forty-year-old dictatorship that demands blind loyalty and silences dissent by means of exile, prison, or execution.

The recovery of Cuba must include not only lifting the embargo and removal of the present government, but also profound changes at many levels. Making people aware of these complexities might be one way to start.

On a happier note, I am glad to inform Brown that, as of July 29, Smith Kline Beecham received approval to buy the meningitis B vaccine from Cuba.

MARIA CRISTINA PRINCE
Floral Park, N.Y.

75

COMMONWEAL

1999 marks *Commonweal's* 75th year of publication.

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The problem is Castro

While I agree with the basic premise of Brian Brown's article, in that I believe that medical supplies should not be part of any economic sanctions, I found the article one-sided and feel it either ignores or distorts a number of basic facts.

Brown conveniently overlooks or misrepresents the following: (1) The embargo was put in place to fight a brutally repressive regime; (2) the same regime has actually increased repression of dissidents every time it has promised an opening; (3) in the exile community both support for the embargo and opposition to it cuts across class lines; much of the support for ending the embargo in the United States comes from large companies

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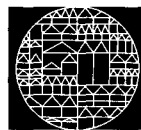
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C O M M O N W E A L



Expelling Darwin

In every flap about evolution, it seems, there is a new Scopes Trial struggling to be born. Why else so much fuss over the Kansas Board of Education's promulgation of guidelines that, if followed, would eliminate any teaching about the evolution of species and natural selection from the science curriculum in public schools? The board, which passed its standards by a 6-4 vote, has no power over the state's 304 public school districts, which can teach evolution or not as they see fit. All the board can do is declare that it will not include anything on these topics in the statewide tests. That is enough, however, to make creationists rejoice and liberal pundits decry a looming threat to "sound science." It is hard to imagine any other pedagogical recommendation, about teaching math, spelling, or geography, for example, stirring such national attention, coming as it did from a relatively powerless board in one Middle American state. But evolution has long been a touchstone of where one stands in American culture, and Darwin's defenders react as ritualistically as his uncultured despisers, driven to reenact the whole saga of struggle against sin and darkness, especially that mythic moment in Dayton, Tennessee, when modernity and unfettered inquiry defied the forces of benighted fundamentalism.

Never mind that Edward J. Larson's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Summer for the Gods* shows how much of the science-versus-superstition, tolerance-versus-dogmatism rendering of the Scopes trial is indeed myth, crystallized in the McCarthy-era drama and film, *Inherit the Wind*. The point is that, for many Americans, conflicts over evolution become conflicts over what they hold most deeply, most religiously, one could say, even in the case of avowed secularists.

Catholics, for the most part, have not seen it that way. Not tied to a literal reading of Scripture, Catholicism adjusted to the scientific evidence, not without reservations and difficulties, but far more easily than Protestantism. Some years ago, a survey of clergy showed that virtually all Catholic priests, in contrast to a significant segment of Protestant leadership, considered evolution strictly a nonproblem. So there is a tendency to look at dust-ups like the current one in Kansas with a detached and superior air. Galileo, after all, is enough of a burden. At least we can stay clear of debates about Darwin.

That kind of complacency would be naïve. Believers who saw from the start that the theory of evolution by natural selection had important religious implications, going far beyond any ostensible clash with the poetic "days" of Genesis, were right. Nonbelievers who saw from the start that the theory of evolution by natural selection made their agnosticism or atheism a lot more plausible, even if not logically inevitable, were also right. Chance, time, and reproductive advantage could do everything that natural theology had so confidently declared the sure sign of God's handiwork. Today, scientific popularizers of evolutionary theory regularly draw metaphysical and theological conclusions from their science, whether in the aggressively antireligious form of a Richard Dawkins or the kinder, gentler kiss-off of a Stephen Jay Gould. Consider the 1995 "Statement on the Teaching of Evolution" by the National Association of Biology Teachers, defining evolution as "an unsupervised, impersonal, unpredictable, and natural process"—later



grudgingly amended when a distinguished philosopher and an equally distinguished historian of world religions pointed out the theological claims packed into those first two adjectives.

At the popular level, evolution by natural selection frequently functions less as scientific theory than as an alternative creation story, competing with theistic ones. That probably explains why, to the consternation of many scientists, the polls show so many Americans resistant to the theory. Actually, the polls notwithstanding, we suspect that a sizable number of Americans simply hew to two rival accounts of life's origins and development, one personal and providential, the other blind and mechanical, not really reconciling them as much as treating each, at times, with varying degrees of skepticism.

This reluctance to face up to underlying conflicts is not limited to the popular mind or an uninvolved Catholicism. Editorialists whose tone suggested that the Kansas board's action had touched a vital ideological nerve nonetheless preferred to couch their objections in strictly practical terms. The *New York Times*, the voice of liberal secular reason, lamented that in Kansas "bright students who might be inclined to pursue scientific careers" could now reach college unprepared (August 13). The *Times*'s star columnist, Frank Rich, relying on a hitherto-unknown theory of welfare dependency, speculated that taxpayers might have "to foot the bill in future welfare programs for graduates of evolution-free high schools sentenced to the bottom rungs of the new economy" (August 28).

But the same paper's reporters made quite clear that what was involved was not just a stumbling block on the road to Harvard but a clash of world views. "At issue for Kansans," wrote Jacques Steinberg from Topeka, "is nothing less than reconciling two central explanations of life: the Darwinian theory that man and monkey gradually branched off of the same family tree millions of years ago as they adjusted to a

changing environment, a contention heavily rooted in scientific evidence, and the creationist belief that a divine being has been pulling the biological levers of the universe, including the origin of man, as described in the Bible" (August 24). Add the supposition that this man-monkey branching was the result of mindless natural mechanisms. Subtract the trivializing, anthropomorphic image of "pulling the biological levers." The result is a serious conflict.

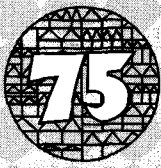
A conflict, one must admit, that is essentially philosophical and theological. And, philosophy and theology being effectively excluded from American public education, the vacuum has been filled by the farrago of anti-Darwinian polemic known as creation science. Although creationist and creation science are terms sometimes extended to tar any insistence on divine creation or any legitimate criticism of neo-Darwinian argument, they properly refer to the tireless efforts, no matter how strained, to put a scientific veneer on a literal reading of Genesis. It is no wonder that Catholics want no part of such gymnastics, which insult our understanding of Scripture as much as our respect for science. But that is no reason to think this is a debate in which the church has no interest, or that the challenges posed to faith by widely accepted views of evolution have been long since adequately met, whether in religious education, Sunday preaching, theological exploration, or thoughtful intervention in the public debate.

Catholic Intellectual Wanted

Commonweal is looking for a journalist/writer to join its staff as an assistant or associate editor. The individual should possess excellent writing and analytical skills and plenty of opinions (the more well-reasoned the better).

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Throughout 1999, *Commonweal* will be celebrating its 75th anniversary. Here from the November 24, 1926 issue is an excerpt from "Autocracy versus Catholicism" by the columnist and political philosopher Walter Lippmann.

Don Sturzo is a priest who in 1919 became the leader of the *Partito Popolare* designed to oppose both reaction and revolution....It is to this writer, a non-Catholic, the most interesting conflict of principle in the whole field of politics. For fascism, wholly apart from its immediate history in Italy, is the logical and uncompromising development of the autocratic state, an absolute centralization of authority in the political state, a resolute denial that there may exist any center of authority outside that of the state....There are no

rights of man, no rights of the family, no rights of association, lay or spiritual, which are independent of the complete authority of the state....In the modern post-Reformation world, Machiavelli's ideas have won, and in the current political philosophy the state is conceived as "unitary, omnipotent, and irresistible." But there has always been an opposing philosophy in which the state was conceived as one corporation with limited and derived powers, existing among other corporations which were autonomous, and endowed with inalienable rights. If I read history correctly, the world owes this conception to the Catholic thinkers who worked it out in their great conflicts with the kings and nobles. Fundamentally it seems to me the only conception of politics which is consistent with a free and civilized life.

WALTER LIPPMANN

OF SEVERAL MINDS

SIDNEY CALLAHAN

SEXUALITY & HOMOSEXUALITY

The church's Gordian knot



Resolved: However provoked, no Christian will use the word "homophobia" or "patriarchy" in heated debate over sex. The current test case is the Vatican's "notification" to Jeannine Gramick, S.S.N.D., and Robert Nugent, S.D.S., that they are permanently barred from further pastoral work with homosexual persons. Their joint ministry of writing, teaching, and building bridges to gay Catholics has been judged to be insufficiently condemnatory of the intrinsic evil of homosexual acts.

Gramick and Nugent are found guilty of ambiguity for overemphasizing the church's positive teachings on homosexuality, that is, that the homosexual condition is not in itself sinful, that ho-

mosexuals must be accorded full civil rights, and that homosexuals possess human dignity as children of God and must be pastorally cared for. But, Rome declares, it is erroneous to mislead gays by neglecting the teaching that homosexuality is an objective disorder that predisposes a person to intrinsically evil acts. Homosexuals have a right and a need "to receive the gospel message in its purity and entirety."

This latest condemnation by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) sets off a firecracker-like string of questions. Was the CDF's appraisal of the work of Gramick and Nugent fair? The investigation and negotiations dragged on for two decades and concluded when the CDF requested writ-

ten statements of internal assent to the church's teaching on homosexuality. Gramick refused and Nugent's nuanced statement of assent was rejected as unacceptable. Was this request for internal assent, which goes beyond the requirement of obedient conformity to church teaching, a chilling effort to coerce conscience? Almost certainly, since as Thomas More (1478-1535) explained to his inquisitors, silence implies consent. No person should legally or morally be punished for his or her private thoughts, only for an action that breaks the law.

Of course, as More's friends and enemies knew, in his heart of hearts More did not approve of King Henry VIII's divorce and elevation to the headship of the English church. And I would bet my bottom dollar that in their heart of hearts Nugent and Gramick do not give internal assent to the whole of the church's current teachings on homosexuality. (I can't.) Despite their careful obedience, they are being punished for a private dissent of conscience. Who knows, they may even have had a procedurally adequate hearing, but the larg-

er questions remain: First, do Catholics have the right in good conscience to dissent from teaching that is authoritatively taught but not infallibly defined? And second, is the CDF's current teaching on homosexuality God's pure and entire gospel truth?

Clearly the answer to the first question is yes and hardly needs to be reargued with references to the hierarchy of truths and the sacredness of conscience. The cutting edge in the present fight is the challenge presented by question number two to the validity of the Vatican's teaching. I am not alone in finding the CDF's current teaching on sexuality and homosexuality to be rationally unconvincing, morally unsound, and theologically inadequate—but not, note well, because of its homophobia or display of patriarchy.

No, the church's teaching on homosexuality, sexuality, and gender is a tightly wrapped package that many intelligent, charitable, and holy men and women believe to be true. Why? First, because they think sexuality is ordered to biological procreation, and this ordering cannot be dispensed with to serve any other human good, such as unity or love. Second, taking biological procreation as the critical standard, men and women are believed to be differentiated in gender and to possess different and complementary vocations in the family and in the church. From the first two premises comes the third. Homosexuality is a fundamental defect because it is not ordered to biological procreation, and same-sex unions cannot be complementary in gender. Homosexual acts are intrinsically evil because they are not procreative and do not take place within marriage. Obviously, these teachings about sex and human nature can be seen as interdependent.

If you say that gender differences are not essentially complementary or determi-

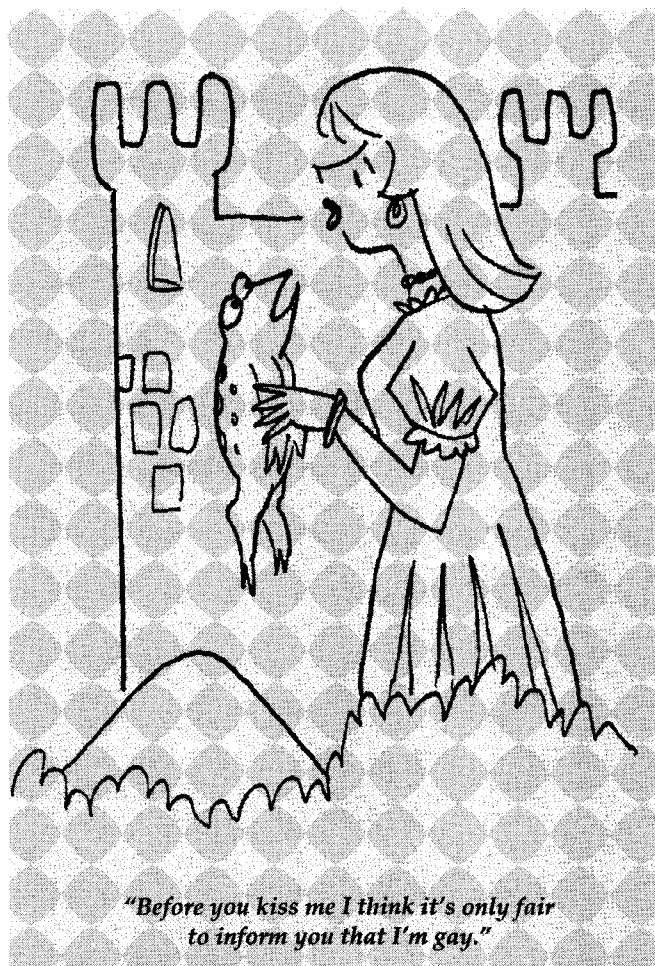
native of vocations, you end up ordaining women and weakening the arguments against same-sex unions. A concession that not every sexual act need be open to procreation as long as it is expressing love in a committed heterosexual marriage leads to the approval of contraception and opens the way to nonprocreative homosexual unions. To accept homosexuality as solely a sexual variation and not a fundamental defect will weaken the assertion that in nature all sexuality must be ordered to procreation. If loving, committed same-sex unions can be moral, what happens to the gender complementarity that sustains the ban on ordaining women? And so it goes, circling round like the blind ox driving the gristmill.

Two final ironies: Homosexuals are told that they must abide by the same sexual morality as heterosexuals. Well and good. A universal principle of equal moral responsibility for all validates the human being's freedom to direct sexual

behavior in accord with moral standards. But heterosexual individuals can freely enter into marriage with a beloved partner and express their love sexually, whether or not procreation is possible. Homosexuals are told that since the only sexual intimacy morally permitted is in marriage, and marriage is impossible for them, they have to be permanently chaste. The homosexual orientation is viewed by the church as involuntary and not sinful, nor is it seen as a defining characteristic of the whole person; but if it is defined as a defect, it forces persons to endure lifelong deprivations that heterosexuals do not face.

In explanations of the church's position, it's often admitted that suffering is being imposed upon homosexuals, a suffering that is justified as morally necessary to follow God's will and to preserve the goods of traditional marriage. But some defenders of the faith go on to claim that since gay persons can pursue friendships, extended family bonds, and charity, what's the problem? This argument denies the reality that experiencing erotic love and sexual joy in committed unions of mutual self-giving is uniquely human and a gift from God.

These current ambiguities, conflicts, and lack of reception of the church's teaching on sexuality signal a crisis in the development of doctrine. More moral, theological, and scientific argument is needed to correct the rigid overvaluation of procreation and gender differences, and the undervaluation of erotic joy. While it may be small comfort to Christians like Jeannine Gramick and Robert Nugent who are being punished for doing good, a new uniquely personal understanding of sexuality is emerging. Of course, pecking this particular ugly duckling out of its hard shell isn't going to be easy; but when the chicken yard is left behind, the swan is going to fly. □



ABIGAIL McCARTHY**SAVING SOCIAL SECURITY***Keep it public*

At a recent panel discussion at Georgetown University's Woodstock Theological Center titled, "Social Security Reform and Catholic Social Teaching," Sharon Daly of Catholic Charities USA called Social Security "the most successful antipoverty program ever known" (*Woodstock Report*, June 1999). And, in *Social Security and Its Enemies* (Westview Press), political scientist Max Skidmore makes a case for Social Security as America's most efficient insurance program and one function the government can perform more effectively and fairly than the private sector can. One hundred and fifty million U.S. workers are protected by Social Security. There are few today who remember the destitution many elderly faced before the program existed. People could work hard all their lives and yet, at the end, be faced with consignment to the local "poorhouse" or the shame of being "on the county."

In 1935 Social Security began to change all that. It gave the elderly dignity and a modicum of self-sufficiency, and did that for the subsequent sixty-four years. Moreover, as William Byron, S.J., pointed out at the Woodstock forum, from its beginning Social Security conformed to the principles of Catholic social teaching, among them the little-understood principle of subsidiarity. That principle limits government by insisting that no higher level of organization should perform a function that can be handled at a lower level by persons who are closer to the problems and closer to the ground. "The fact is," concluded Byron, "no individuals or groups, no lower levels of government or private organizations could have done what Social Security began to do in 1935."

But now Social Security is threatened.

By the year 2034 the ratio of beneficiaries to wage earners will change dramatically. People are having fewer children than they did during the baby boom. They are living up to twenty years longer than they used to after reaching sixty-five. And many are retiring sooner. At the forum, Matthew Weidinger, a staff member of the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Social Security, explained the problem clearly: "If you understand that Social Security is a program that taxes workers today to provide benefits primarily to retirees and other beneficiaries today, then you understand the impact of these changing demographics," he said. "Where once we had about forty workers per beneficiary, today we have three workers per beneficiary, and by the time I retire there will be only two workers per beneficiary."

That is certainly a dire prospect. There is no way that such a diminished number of workers can provide the funds for adequate payments for that number of retirees, if taxes and benefits are maintained at the current rate. A solution must be found other than raising the tax a projected 15 percent or cutting benefits by 13 percent. But is the solution proposed by those for whom Weidinger works, Congressmen Bill Archer (R-Tex.) and Clay Shaw (R-Fla.), the best one? That was the leading question raised at the Woodstock forum.

According to Weidinger, the Archer-Shaw plan proposes to take the current Social Security surplus and distribute it among workers by giving them tax credits to be deposited automatically in savings accounts in the workers' names. Thus, every year everyone in the work force covered by Social Security would get a tax credit. The savings account built over time could be used by the workers to choose investments. Ultimately these beneficiaries would have

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Shadows

If the great downy underwings carry hidden shadows,
we below, through our distracted, rushed sympathies,
understand that when we are lost there can

be the strange flutter, where we find around us,
pooled and concentric, a sudden comprehension.

Is there a difference in us after that?
Do the long, winding streets, carefully
swept in the morning, lead somewhere now?

The trees beside the curb release a fall
of gummy seeds that can't sprout,
that lie all night under the moon.

Startled, we wander off beside the water,
to where we imagine music plays, something
to lend us a geometry of breathing-together

for a while. Abalone glints like the moon,
skull-shell that dreams of waves caught in a jar,
compressed and alchemized into knowledge.

Gerrye Payne

individual accounts that would support their Social Security benefits.

Teresa Ghilarducci, director of the Higgins Labor Research Center at the University of Notre Dame and another participant in the forum, objected to the plan as a disguised kind of privatization. "You can't think of Social Security as a system of accounts," she said, "just as you wouldn't think of your fire insurance coverage as a place where you have an account. It is insurance. It's social insurance." As a contributing worker, if you are disabled or live past retirement age, then you get the benefit of the insurance that is Social Security.

Ghilarducci's own proposed remedy for strengthening Social Security is to expand the payroll base, which is now capped at \$68,000 a year, whether you are the average worker or a very wealthy one like Bill Gates. Expand the cap base to \$90,000 or perhaps \$100,000, she contends, and you solve the problem.

In an addendum to the *Woodstock Report*, Father Byron noted that, given the

forum's responsibility, it was not surprising that the panel discussion focused on the Archer-Shaw plan. Another plan meriting serious study is that of Robert M. Ball, the person who has had the most effect on Social Security since its beginning. Ball was the Social Security commissioner under Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon.

According to the July-August *AARP Bulletin*, it was Ball who developed the Social Security disability insurance program, managed the enrollment of millions into Medicare, put into effect the automatic cost-of-living adjustment for retirees, and oversaw a 25-percent growth in benefits. Ball is concerned that reformers will wreck the successful system by trying to privatize it in one way or another. Any option of diverting a portion of payroll taxes into individual investment accounts is privatization; it would take money out of Social Security trust funds and make it difficult to award full benefits to current retirees.

Ball does not dispute the necessity of

doing something to avert the future crisis, but he argues that a few adjustments can preserve Social Security's benefits for generations to come. He favors, as does Ghilarducci, a tax increase, not for everyone, but for people at the high end of the income scale. His approach is two-part: First, increase the maximum amount of wages subject to Social Security taxation in small steps over ten years, eventually to about \$187,200 over a decade. Second, as President Bill Clinton has proposed, use part of the projected huge federal surplus to bolster the Social Security trust funds. Ball favors investing about 15 percent of this money in Government National Mortgage Association (Ginnie Mae) bonds or high-grade corporate bonds with a higher yield than the Treasury notes in which the fund now invests exclusively.

These steps, Ball believes, along with smaller changes like including new state and local government employees in Social Security, would avoid the anticipated deficits and assure full benefits for seventy-five years.

In the light of Catholic social teaching, these proposals and all others to guarantee the long-term viability of Social Security must be evaluated in terms of the *common good*. The common good clearly includes economic security above the poverty line for those of and past retirement age. As a guide to evaluating any plan, William Byron recommends the criteria for reform proposed in a recent book, *Countdown to Reform: The Great Social Security Debate* by Henry J. Aaron and Robert D. Reischauer (Century, 1998). The authors' final word, after listing their criteria, is a touchstone for our consideration: "No plan that provides inadequate benefits, fails to protect low earners, and gives a poor return for each dollar of taxes paid; that subjects workers to excessive risk; that generates needless administrative complexity; and that does nothing to boost national saving should merit serious consideration."

Little is more important to us now than giving thought and support to how the most successful antipoverty program ever known is to be saved. □

HOME AT LAST

The pilgrimage of Claude McKay

David Goldweber

There have been a good number of conversions of twentieth-century intellectuals to Catholicism, but few are as intriguing as the conversion of the poet, novelist, and critic Claude McKay. McKay. Along with Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen, McKay is considered one of the great poets of the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s. A man of contradictions, involved by turns with atheism, homosexuality, Islam, Soviet communism, and Marcus Garvey's Black Nationalist movement, McKay at last found that for him only Roman Catholicism offered peace, order, wonder, and truth.

Born in Jamaica in 1890, McKay moved to Harlem in 1915 to join the burgeoning literary scene. In Harlem he contributed articles to Garvey's *Negro World* and had a brief passion for men. With the publication of his *Harlem Shadows*, a volume of poetry in 1921, McKay became known as the most fiery and vociferous black poet of the day. His work lacked the jazzy inventiveness of Hughes and the stately craftsmanship of Cullen, but it compensated through the sheer force of its honesty and bluntness. In *Harlem Shadows*, McKay showed belligerence, sorrow, hatred for Western civilization, and rage against Christianity. The poem "Enslaved" blamed what McKay called the "Christian West" for ravaging the "Black Land" of Africa. The poem "Baptism" invoked Christianity in order to distort it, telling of an imagined antibaptism in which McKay saw himself baptized by the fires of white racism to become an avenging warrior. This poem was followed in the *Harlem Shadows* volume by the sonnet "If We Must Die"—McKay's most famous poem—which imagined a war between blacks and whites, the whites "mad and hungry dogs" and even "monsters" whose injustices are to be met with violence. Never a man to compromise, McKay became furious when an editor toned down his sonnet "The White House" by renaming it "White Houses" (and thereby blunting its political bite) for its inclusion in the *Survey Graphic* literature anthology of 1924. The editor, Alain Locke, was among the best known and most powerful figures of the black literary scene, but this did not stop McKay from writing an angry letter of protest threatening to become Locke's "intellectual enemy for all time" if such an event occurred again.

David Goldweber teaches English in the San Francisco Bay Area. He is currently working on a study of the Harlem Renaissance in relation to European Romanticism.

Through the early 1920s, McKay continued to see Christianity only as a tool of oppressive white capitalists. He became involved with the Communist party, left the United States, and spent time in Europe, North Africa, and Soviet Russia. He seemed steadfast and resolute in his beliefs, intending never to return to the United States until it had overthrown its capitalist order. But then McKay began to change.

The seeds of McKay's attraction to Christianity began in the late 1920s after he became aware of the beauty of the great European cathedrals, especially the Catholic ones in Spain. At this same time he found himself disappointed with communism, which he increasingly found to be close-minded, partisan, and cold. In 1925, McKay extolled not Lenin's tomb in Moscow but Saint Isaac's Church in Petrograd. "What jeweled glory fills my spirit's eye," he wrote, "What golden grandeur moves the depths of me! ...Bow down in worship, humble and alone, / Bow lowly down before the sacred sight / Of man's divinity alive in stone." He could not shake the sense of something transcendent working in and through human life. For a brief time in the early 1930s, realizing he believed in God but not yet feeling ready for Christianity, McKay studied Islam, but was uncomfort-



able with it. Having become a fervent anti-Communist after the Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939, McKay returned to the United States, changing his citizenship from Jamaican to American in 1940.

McKay's closeness to Catholicism began in earnest in 1942, after he became seriously ill with hypertension and edema. Through his friend Ellen Tarry, a noted black writer and a Catholic convert, McKay received medical help at the Catholic-run Friendship House in Harlem. Established in 1938, Friendship House provided medical services, study clubs, and recreational facilities for the Harlem poor, and preached against the spread of atheism and communism. McKay was impressed with the Friendship House staff for helping him through his illness without attempting to convert him. He visited their headquarters regularly in the following months and grew convinced that the Catholic church was the best hope for preserving humanity's spirituality in the face of narrow-minded modern-day "isms." A year passed, and, while attending Mass and exploring Catholicism, McKay realized where he was heading. In 1943 he began writing a long sonnet sequence called the "Cycle Manuscript." In the first of these sonnets, usually considered the sequence's best, McKay anticipates his conversion:

These poems distilled from my experience,
Exactly tell my feelings of today,
The cruel and the vicious and the tense
Conditions which have hedged my bitter way
Of life. But though I suffered much I bore
My cross and lived to put my trouble in song,
I stripped down harshly to the naked core
Of hatred based on the essential wrong!
But tomorrow, I may sing another tune,
No critic, white or black, can tie me down,
Maybe a fantasy of a fairy moon,
Or the thorns the soldiers weaved for Jesus' crown,
For I, a poet, can soar with unclipped wings,
From earth to heaven, while chanting of all things.

It was the social aspects of Catholicism that McKay found initially compelling. In a June 1943 letter to Mary Keating, one of McKay's friends at Friendship House, he wrote that he was considering converting more for "social" reasons than "religious" ones. But he would not let himself commit without sincere belief.

In early 1944, Keating helped McKay get a job in the newly established Friendship House headquarters in Chicago, the only Friendship House still operating today. Friendship House Chicago had the backing of Bishop Bernard Sheil. Known as "labor's bishop" or "the people's bishop," Sheil was first noticed in 1939 when, as an auxiliary bishop, he sided with the Chicago meatpacking workers in their fight to be recognized as a union. His fame grew as the leader of the Catholic Youth Organization (which swelled from a small

Chicago boys' club in 1930 to 10 million members nationwide by the mid-fifties). He was also an outspoken opponent not only of communism but also of anti-Communist fanatics (Sheil's anti-McCarthy speech of 1954 was the first public statement by a prominent Catholic clergyman). He also preached fervently against racism and anti-Semitism, and made efforts to get the CIO and other unions to admit black workers. He founded an adult-education school (the Sheil School of Social Studies) and a radio station, worked with Presidents Roosevelt and Truman, and was given the title of archbishop by Pope John XXIII in 1959. Articles and notes by or about Sheil appeared variously in the 1940s and '50s in *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *Life*. *Commonweal* reported on Sheil and the Friendship Houses no fewer than a dozen times.

In the spring of 1944, McKay moved to Chicago and began working as Sheil's advisor on black affairs and on Soviet communism. He also began to study Catholicism directly and to consult with Chicago priests. Day by day he felt himself becoming ready to convert, but he needed to be fully convinced. In a June 1944 letter to his lifelong friend Max Eastman, McKay wrote: "If and when I take the step I want to be intellectually honest and sincere about it. From the social angle I am quite clear and determined. I know that the Catholic church is the one great organization which can check the Communists and probably lick them. But there is also the religious angle." Eastman, still a Communist sympathizer, told McKay he considered Catholicism a form of totalitarianism, but McKay's faith was growing stronger. "By becoming a Catholic," wrote McKay, "I would merely be giving religion the proper place it had in my nature and in man's nature." He did not deny validity in other religions, but he felt Catholicism was his birthright as a son of the Western world. At last, in a letter of August 16, 1944, McKay declared: "I do believe in the mystery of the symbol of the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, through which all of humanity may be united in brotherly love." He was baptized on October 11 of that year. A few days after his conversion he wrote that Catholicism will be "the final stage of my hectic life."

McKay continued to support Catholicism for social principles as well as religious ones. He wrote, in a 1946 letter, that he had become able "to think of people with wonder and love as I did as a boy in Jamaica, and the Catholic church with its discipline and traditions and understanding of human nature is helping me a lot." In the March 1946 issue of *Ebony*, McKay published a one-page explanation, "Why I Became a Catholic," which associates Protestantism with bigotry, slavery, and greed; Catholicism with tolerance and compassion. He warns black Americans to beware "the materialistic Protestant god of progress" and declares, "In joining the Roman Catholic church, I feel proud of belonging to that vast universal body of Christians, which is the greatest stabilizing force in the world today—standing as a bulwark against all the wild and purely materialistic 'isms' that are sweeping the world." McKay was extreme in his remarks, but he was sincere in what he wrote and believed. In

a September 1946 letter he assures his friends that he became a Catholic for "sincere religious reasons."

McKay went on to teach at the Sheil School, work in the Catholic Youth Organization, and contribute poems to Dorothy Day's *Catholic Worker*. Some of McKay's friends and some of his early biographers were suspicious of his conversion, seeing it as a sort of capitulation and job opportunity after a life of involvement with unsuccessful causes. But recent biographers (Wayne F. Cooper, *Claude McKay: Rebel Sojourner in the Harlem Renaissance* [Louisiana State University Press, 1987] and Tyrone Tillery, *Claude McKay: A Black Poet's Struggle for Identity* [University of Massachusetts Press, 1992]) have noted McKay's lifelong spirit of independence, refusal to compromise, and commitment to honesty. His decision was neither quick nor easy; it was the result of very deep and serious thought.

And perhaps a part of McKay saw a glimpse of heavenly light even in his most dark and angry times. The 1921 *Harlem Shadows* held much resentment and hatred, yet the volume's opening poem was a sensitive lyric titled "The Easter Flower." Here, McKay acknowledges he is a nonbeliever, yet admits he cannot but feel a brief holy reverence:

Far from this foreign Easter damp and chilly
My soul steals to a pear-shaped plot of ground,
Where gleamed the lilac-tinted Easter lily
Soft-scented in the air for yards around;
Alone, without a hint of guardian leaf!
Just like a fragile bell of silver rime,
It burst the tomb for freedom sweet and brief
In the young pregnant year at Eastertime;
And many thought it was a sacred sign,
And some called it the resurrection flower;
And I, a pagan, worshipped at its shrine,
Yielding my heart unto its perfumed power.

We might also turn to the closing poem of that volume, "Through Agony," where McKay at once confronts romantic and spiritual torments. It opens: "All night, through the eternity of night,/Pain was my portion though I could not feel." It ends:

The mists will shroud me on the utter height,
The salty, brimming waters of my breast
Will mingle with the fresh dews of the night
To bathe my spirit hankering to rest.
But after sleep I'll wake with greater might,
Once more to venture on the eternal quest.

Perhaps this younger McKay would not have been so surprised at his older self, whose "quest" for coherence and community had discovered a humanism and spirituality united in Catholicism that brought him inspiration and brotherhood. McKay died quietly of heart failure in a Chicago hospital in 1948, having become, after so many years of emptiness and bitterness, a man of hope and peace. □

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OUTSIDE THE CHURCH

Whom Catholics marry & where

James D. Davidson

Are more young Catholics marrying outside the church today, without seeking its approval? The answer seems to be yes. While sociological surveys indicate that interfaith marriages are increasing, data from *The Official Catholic Directory* report that intermarriages are declining. When I ask parish and diocesan pastoral leaders what they make of this discrepancy, they reach the same conclusion I do: More and more interfaith marriages are indeed taking place outside the church. This situation, if true, would have enormous pastoral implications for persons working with young and marriage-age Catholics, and it would portend profound changes for the future of American Catholicism in general.

Historically, the pre-Vatican II church discouraged Catholics from marrying members of other faiths. If a Catholic insisted on marrying a non-Catholic, the church countenanced a simple exchange of vows in the rectory or at a side chapel. Furthermore, it strongly urged the spouse to convert to Catholicism, and it required that the children be raised Catholic. But despite the church's efforts to discourage interfaith marriages, even in the 1940s and 1950s such unions comprised about 27 percent of all church-sanctioned marriages.

Nowadays, some three decades following the changes inaugurated by Vatican II, the Catholic church is more inclined to treat interfaith marriages with the same respect and even solemnity it grants marriages involving two Catholics. Marriages between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic ("mixed marriages"), and those involving a Catholic and a nonbaptized person ("disparity of cult") are usually public ceremonies, celebrated in the church. Sometimes a representative of the non-Catholic spouse's faith tradition may even participate in the ceremony as an official witness. The church also is more lenient in granting permission for interfaith marriages to take place in other churches. Though the Catholic church continues to stress the advantages of parents having the same religion and raising the children in the Catholic faith, its approach to these matters involves greater respect for the wishes of the non-Catholic spouse.

Not surprisingly, then, surveys show that the rate of in-

terfaith marriage continues to rise. In a 1988 article in the *Review of Religious Research*, Alan McCutcheon used data from the highly regarded General Social Survey to show that the intermarriage rate for white Catholics, which was 18 percent among persons married prior to the 1930s, jumped to 33 percent in the 1930s and 1940s, increased to 36 percent in the 1950s and 1960s, and climbed to 43 percent in the 1970s. In a 1991 article in the *American Sociological Review*, Matthijs Kalmijn studied data from national surveys in 1955, 1965, and 1972-89 and found that the intermarriage rate among Catholics "increased dramatically between the 1920s and the 1980s." Finally, in a 1993 article in the *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, William Sander, using data from the 1987-91 General Social Survey, reported a similar increase. For cradle Catholics, the percentage of Catholic men married to a person of another faith rose from 22 percent in the pre-1930 birth cohort to 48 percent for men born in the 1950s. The same pattern held for women who were raised Catholic.

In 1995, colleagues and I examined interfaith marriage rates in a national survey of American Catholics (including Hispanics, Asians, and African-Americans). As we reported in *The Search for Common Ground* (Our Sunday Visitor, 1997), today's intermarriage rate for Catholics is at least twice what it was in the pre-Vatican II era (see table 1). Whereas only 16 percent of Catholics born before 1941 (the pre-Vatican II cohort) are—or, if widowed, separated, or divorced, were—in interfaith marriages, 32 percent of Catholics born between 1941 and 1960 (the Vatican II cohort) are/were in such marriages, and 40 percent of Catholics born between 1961 and 1977 (the post-Vatican II cohort) are/were intermarried. Thus, separate and quite reliable national surveys point to the same conclusion: More and more Catholics are involved in interfaith marriages.

While national surveys clearly establish that the intermarriage rate is rising, church data in *The Official Catholic Directory* (OCD) paint a very different picture (see figure 1).

Table 1

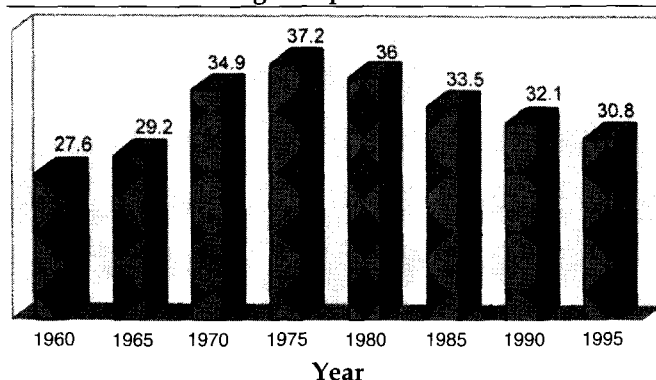
Interfaith Marriages as Percent of All Marriages
Reported in 1995 National Survey

Post-Vatican II Generation	40
Vatican II Generation	32
Pre-Vatican II Generation	16

James D. Davidson is professor of sociology at Purdue University. He is senior author of *The Search for Common Ground*, which received the 1998 Research Award from the National Conference of Catechetical Leadership.

Figure 1

Interfaith Marriages as Percent of All Marriages Reported in OCD



Data reported in the 1960 *OCD* indicate an intermarriage rate of 27.6 percent. The rate rose to 29.2 percent in 1965, 34.9 percent in 1970, and 37.2 percent in 1975 (far higher than it had been in any previous year). But, according to the *OCD*, the intermarriage rate has declined ever since, sliding to 33.5 percent in 1985 and to 30.8 percent in 1995.

Thus, it can be seen that there is a significant difference between the results of the national surveys quoted above and data reported by the *OCD*. These wide disparities raise at least three questions: How do survey researchers and the *OCD* collect their data on intermarriage? How are we to interpret the fact that national surveys show an increase in intermarriage while the *OCD* data point to a curvilinear pattern? (Are interfaith marriages on the rise or not?) Finally, what might our interpretation imply for church leaders?

National surveys are based on telephone interviews. Researchers ask people what their religious affiliation is. Responses indicate people's religious identifications ("I am Baptist"; "I'm a Catholic"; "I don't belong to any church"). Survey researchers often ask self-identified Catholics whether they are married, widowed, divorced, separated, or single (never married). Then they usually ask those who are (or ever were) married about the religious affiliation of their spouse (before marriage and/or at the time of the interview). Researchers record all interfaith marriages, whether they have taken place in the church or not.

The Official Catholic Directory uses a very different approach. It collects data from dioceses, which get their figures from parishes. Parishes report only the number of weddings that ordained ministers (priests or deacons) have witnessed, or that were authorized by granting spe-

cial dispensations to Catholics who marry in other churches. Parish weddings and dispensations are then combined into one statistic indicating the total number of marriages that are sanctioned by the church or officially dispensed from the ordinary form. Parishes also record whether these marriages involved two Catholics (called "Catholic" marriages) or a Catholic and a non-Catholic (called "interfaith" marriages).

These varying methodologies lead to strikingly different conclusions. The surveys—which report all intermarriages (whether they are sanctioned by the church or not)—indicate that interfaith marriages are increasing, while church records—which include only sanctioned intermarriages—indicate that interfaith marriages are declining. The disparity in findings implies that more and more intermarriages are taking place outside the church.

Sociologist Michael Hornsby-Smith has documented just such a trend among Catholics in England (see his *Roman Catholics in England*, Cambridge University Press, 1987). His data indicate that before 1939, church-sanctioned marriages constituted 91 percent of all marriages, but that by the 1970s, they had shrunk to 64 percent. Unsanctioned marriages involving a Catholic quadrupled in the same period, from only 9 percent to 36 percent, and interfaith marriages rose from 28 percent to 66 percent of all marriages. Sanctioned interfaith marriages increased from 22 percent to 33 percent; unsanctioned jumped from a mere 6 percent to 33 percent.

There are no comparable data for the United States, since neither the church nor civil authorities here collect figures on the number of unsanctioned interfaith marriages. However, there are several reasons to believe that interfaith marriages are increasingly taking place without the authorization of the church.

First, research shows that today's young-adult Catholics are less attached to the church than other generations of Catholics. Their religious outlook is more personal and individualistic than institutional. They are not as likely to attend Mass regularly. They are less likely to say the church is an important part of their lives. They are more likely to say they can

imagine circumstances under which they might leave the church. It is reasonable to assume that when they think of getting married, they are more willing to marry people of other faiths and bypass the church's canonical processes.

Second, the number of church-sanctioned marriages is declining. The 1960 edition of *The Official Catholic Directory* indicated a total of 303,735 valid marriages the previous year. That figure rose to 336,276 in the 1965 edition and to 405,066 in the 1970 issue. But ever since, the number of valid marriages has generally fallen, declining to 382,861 in 1975



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and 339,531 in 1980. It increased slightly in 1985 to 341,099, declined again to 329,446 in 1990 and to only 293,434 in 1995.

Third, the declining number of valid church marriages cannot be attributed to a downturn in either the U.S. population or the U.S. Catholic population. The U.S. population rose steadily from 181 million in 1960 to 263 million in 1995, while the Catholic population increased from 38 million to 55 million over the same period. Nor can the decline in church-sanctioned marriages be fully explained by a decline in the number of people of marrying age. While the number of marriage-age Catholics and other Americans dipped less than 5 percent between 1975 and 1995, the number of church-sanctioned weddings declined 23 percent during that period. Finally, the 23-percent decline in church-sanctioned marriages exceeded the overall decline in American marriages, which were down only 9 percent between 1975 and 1995. Observing that the Catholic marriage rate has declined more rapidly than the marriage rate for the U.S. population as a whole, Joseph Claude Harris recently noted in *America* (April 10, 1999) that "Many Catholics apparently do not choose to be married in a church."

Fourth, previous research indicates that interfaith marriages are more likely to take place outside the church. Compared to first marriages involving two Catholics, religiously-mixed first marriages in which one partner is Catholic are at least twice as likely to involve a civil ceremony, not a church wedding.

Finally, when I have presented my thesis to diocesan and parish leaders, they concur that the number of unsanctioned interfaith marriages is increasing. My statistical data are consistent with their pastoral experiences.

These findings suggest that the church is losing touch with young marriage-age Catholics. While there is relatively little that church leaders can do to reverse overarching societal conditions that contribute to this situation, ecclesiastical authorities can affect church policies and programs. For example, diocesan and parish leaders can and ought to examine marriage preparation policies, some of which seem to be a double-edge sword. Clearly, there are spiritual and marital benefits for persons who go through marriage preparation, especially those who

participate in eight to nine sessions lasting twenty-six to thirty hours (see the Creighton University report: *Marriage Preparation in the Catholic Church*). But, the fact is, today many young people initially see no value in the church's marriage preparation process. Some dismiss it as the church's last-minute attempt to impose its views about birth control and similar issues. Others do not want to commit to numerous, time-consuming sessions. When offered only one format (a series of private sessions with a priest), these young adults—especially interfaith couples—often demur and simply opt to marry outside the church. However, if given an opportunity to pick among several formats (for example, weekend sessions with married couples, or private sessions with mentor couples), they may be more inclined to participate. Assuming that some marriage preparation is better than none and that church leaders prefer valid marriages over invalid ones, the challenge seems clear: Offer a variety of formats so that marriage preparation is accessible, meaningful, and tailored to couples' different needs.

A review of catechetical programs, youth ministries, and young-adult programs may also be in order. Key issues would include the extent to which, and the ways in which, these programs stress the sacramentality of marriage, the benefits of marrying someone of the same faith, and the value of being married in the church. They would also include the potential problems associated with mixed marriages, such as the increased likelihood of divorce.

Priests and liturgists should also work with young adults in the parishes to design worship experiences that will invite such young people to make the church a more integral part of their lives. When worship experiences are oriented toward young adults (as they are on many college campuses and at selected Masses in some parishes), they provide the attendees with special opportunities to relate the church to their lives at a point when they are considering marriage partners.

In addition to these rather programmatic responses, church leaders might also explore new ways of building positive relationships with young Catholics and the people who are significant in their lives. With occasional phone calls and e-mail messages, parish staff could maintain contact with young adults, whether they remain in the community or have moved on to other communities for school or work. Such contacts would demonstrate the church's interest in their well-being, and would provide opportunities to minister to them when they are making decisions about careers, family life, and faith.

Finally, clergy and lay leaders should make it a priority to forge strong relationships with young couples—especially interfaith couples—as they adjust to married life. Through mentoring couples and support groups for newlyweds, leaders could increase the church's opportunities to affirm and educate young adults at a very important time in their lives. These relationships would also increase opportunities to retain and minister to young people who must be the backbone of the church in the next century. □

CATHOLICISM LITE

Confessions of a catechism teacher

John J. Schommer

Four years ago last summer, my wife and I were asked to teach a junior high Parish Religious Education (PRE) class in rural northwest Tennessee. We had moved to this parish only the previous year and had spent our first year content simply to participate in the parish liturgically. Feeling that it was probably time to become more intimately involved in parish life, we said yes when we were asked to do some teaching on Sunday. The three years that followed were a revelation. It's hard to know the extent to which our experience might be considered common, but if it is at all the norm, parish religious education is facing an enormous challenge.

We began our first year of teaching using a religious ed series that we found in the parish library. The good thing about the series was that it played well to the legendary short attention span of today's kids. Each lesson consisted of four or so twelve-minute segments. These segments consisted of surveys (lots of them), one-act plays, discussions, and various other activities, all well designed to keep young energy on task. The only problem we had with this—and it was a big one—was that it was hard to identify anything uniquely Catholic about any of the lessons. Jesus was guaranteed at least one appearance per lesson, thereby qualifying what we were doing as nominally Christian, but most of what we were doing could easily have been done as part of character education in a public school; not much of what we taught would have caused a member of the ACLU the slightest constitutional concern. When it became clear that there would never be much specifically Catholic content to our lessons, my wife and I began looking around for other texts.

The next text we chose was packed with high Catholic content. We were proud to have found it and promptly sent letters home to our kids' parents raving about it. But after just a few short weeks we found ourselves faced with a new problem: There was too much information. It was a perfect

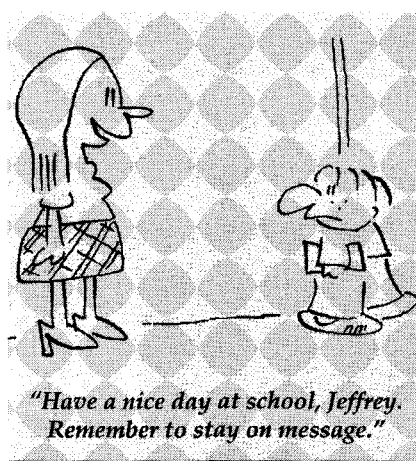
amount undoubtedly if we were a Catholic grammar school where religion could be taught every day; but far too much for a PRE class that met for only fifty minutes per week.

The following year, we stubbornly adopted another book from our high-content series, and began something new; to emphasize the importance we placed on this content, we introduced weekly quizzes. As the new school year began, we sent calendars home which mapped out for parents the entire school year—what chapters from the book we planned to cover and when. Classes might be canceled for various reasons or the content might change because of unforeseen circumstances, but students could expect a quiz each week on the assigned chapter. No exceptions. When students missed class, a blank quiz was mailed home to parents and a completed quiz was expected back the following week.

Inflexible as this may sound, we had at least one very strong reason for believing that this policy would be successful. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is quite clear: Parents are the primary educators of their children. Surely our well-educated parents would sit down with their children during the week and read the assignment. Surely they would keep their kids current when they missed a class. Surely they would help their kids to prepare for the quizzes.

Well, no. The quizzes were a disaster all around. An average grade of 40 percent was not unusual. Furthermore, despite the fact that we never made an issue of this in conversation with parents, some of them with whom we had been friendly could barely look us in the eye as the weeks passed. Not a single judgmental word had left our mouths, but there was enough guilt around to pave a parking lot.

To alleviate that problem, last year we tried something new with the quizzes, to make them fail-proof: We sent home a whole term's worth of quizzes on the first day of the quarter. They were essentially the same quizzes we would give out on Sundays, but with one exception: The order of the questions was changed. Teaching was easier, but the results were just as frustrating. The grades proved every bit as bad. Why?



John J. Schommer is an assistant professor of mathematics at the University of Tennessee at Martin. He directed his first parish confirmation class last spring.

The usual chain of blame in education goes like this: College teachers blame high school teachers, high school teachers blame grammar school teachers, and grammar school teachers blame parents. The temptation to blame parents is indeed overwhelming. It seems so obvious that parents—even the ones who take the initiative to enroll their kids in Sunday school—spend far more time driving their kids to soccer practice than they do teaching them the fundamentals of the faith. And yet, despite what appears to be clear evidence against them, I wonder to what extent we can truly hold parents culpable. The catechism tells us that “unintentional ignorance can diminish or even remove the imputability of a grave offense.” Let’s put aside the question of whether it is a grave offense for a parent to allow an intelligent eighth grader to receive poor quiz grades in PRE all year long with no fear of adverse consequences. I believe one can make a case that parents who allow this kind of behavior are unintentionally ignorant of just how hurtful this is to our church.

To begin with, there is no consensus in the Catholic adult community that high-content lessons and subsequent quizzes are what we should be offering in PRE. On the contrary, the adult consensus seems to be that young people are simply not ready for any serious study of their faith and that it shouldn’t be thrust upon them. After all, we wouldn’t want to alienate our young people from the church, would we?

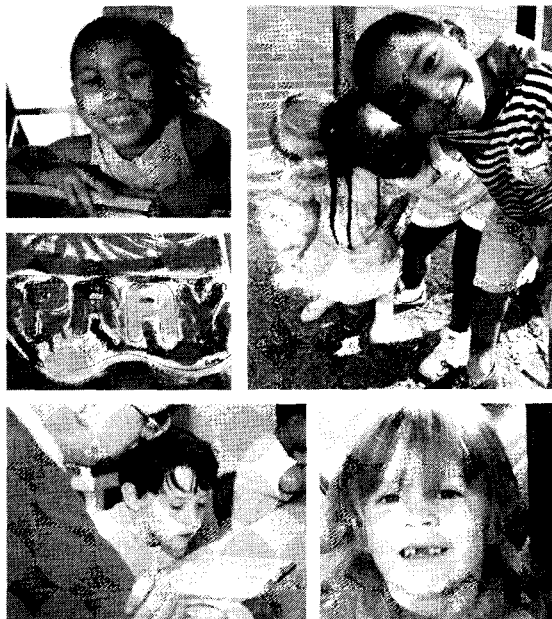
Yet it is far from clear that this consensus has its basis in fact. For some time, questions about the value of contemporary “lite” religious education have begun to emerge, not only in Catholic circles, but also in mainline Christian denominations. In an April 23, 1997, *Christian Century* article, “The Case for Catechism,” Richard Osmer argued that a low-content religious education rooted in children’s experiences simply hasn’t lived up to its claims of superiority; the younger generation continues to leave mainline churches in depressing numbers. He urged mainline Protestants to consider seriously the adoption of a rigorous catechism in order to stanch the hemorrhage of members. Osmer’s article should be required reading for all Catholic educators.

One of the biggest obstacles to changing adult minds about content level is the fact that the contemporary secular education community tells us that education should be not about learning facts, dates, and vocabulary (certainly it should not be about this), but about teaching students more generally how to think. This philosophy seems to act as a powerful undertow on Catholic education: facts, dates, and vocabulary are out, “moral reasoning” is in.

But if we believe that young adults need to listen attentively to the readings at Mass, don’t they need to know who the Pharisees were? The Samaritans? We claim to want them to be able to think ecumenically, but doesn’t this require that they know a little something about the Reformation? about the doctrinal differences that divide the various Chris-

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tian denominations? Don't they need to be acquainted with the dogmatic claims of their own Catholic tradition before they can talk intelligently with their peers from other Christian denominations?

When content-lite educational theories hold sway in the broader culture, how easily can we blame Catholic parents for believing that the best thing that Sunday school can do is teach their children how to be nice or that their children will learn the "boring details" of Catholic faith and history later in their lives when they are "ready"?

Certainly another exculpatory fact to consider is that many sincere and actively practicing Catholic parents feel ignorant of the teachings of their own faith. Most of the parents my age attended high school a decade after Vatican II when the social justice message dominated high school curricula. I can't say for sure what my peers were doing in their religious ed classes, but I know I was playing "Guns or Butter" and watching videotapes of *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*. Most of what I learned about the Catholic faith in the years since grammar school I learned on my own, a full ten years after wandering away from the church during college. Can we really blame today's parents for fearing the intelligent questions of their thirteen-year-old as they read an eighth-grade text with their child? How have we as a church helped to prepare parents to be what the catechism says they should be: the "primary educators of their children"?

If the sole reason parents enroll their children in Sunday

school is so that their kids can learn how to be nice, then my own experience is that they might as well skip it. The junior high students that my wife and I have taught already seem like nice, respectful youngsters and are probably well on their way to becoming thoughtful, concerned adults. An extra hour of parish fellowship would probably be far more valuable to our children on the niceness front than the hour we spend with them in formal religious education.

If the main thing we want from religious education is to develop a social conscience in our kids, then we might do well simply to send them to programs at any number of progressive mainline Christian denominations.

If the main thing we want from PRE is children with a thorough knowledge of Bible stories and an ability to quote chapter and verse, again, such schools are already up and running. For intensive schooling in the Bible, the Baptists would surely be hard to beat.

But if we want our kids to have a uniquely Catholic education, an education that leaves them knowing something of the rich history of their church, and the specific teachings of the Catholic faith, as well as the kind of good works the Catholic faith enjoins, then there is simply no substitute for sustained parish involvement in religious education. And that means no substitute for high-content programs that require much of adult and child alike. If we are serious about passing on the Catholic faith, isn't this the kind of program we ought to be offering? □

BROKEN BODY TO BROKEN BODY

Learning the languages of faith

Lyn Burr Brignoli

*There are doubtless many different languages in the world,
and none is without meaning....*

1 Corinthians 14:10

One afternoon a week I teach two Down's syndrome children, Christina and Dragen, eleven- and six years old, respectively. I am instructing them "in the faith," a task I find enormously challenging. I feel as if I am engaging in a problem of translation—how to translate faith into a language each of these children can understand. What language do you speak with a child who can barely talk?

Music is quite effective, I am discovering. I have a tape recorder that looks like a lunch box with a sing-along microphone that looks like a little ice cream cone. The children take turns holding the microphone. Dragen's favorite song is "Thank You, Jesus." The refrain goes, "Thank you, thank you, Jesus in my heart." When we get to the part about the heart, Dragen grins, points to his chest, and pretends he is strumming a guitar. Dragen loves to sing.

Although Christina doesn't sing, she still likes to hold the microphone. The first time I put on the Taizé song, "Jesus, Remember Me When You Come into Your Kingdom," Christina became very still, holding the microphone with one hand, listening as if she were hearing something I couldn't hear myself. After a while a deep chuckle came out of her belly, and she leaned over and kissed me. I don't know what is happening inside Christina's small head or her uncoordinated body when she lets her glasses slip down over her nose. She kind of cocks her head to one side, and a peaceful, radiant look comes over her. This music is her favorite part of our time together.

In the room there are two crucifixes; one is quite magnificent—about eighteen inches high, carved ivory in a glass case. Part of our ritual is to identify these figures of Jesus on the walls. We say,

"Who's that?"

"It's Jesus."

"Is that the cross?"

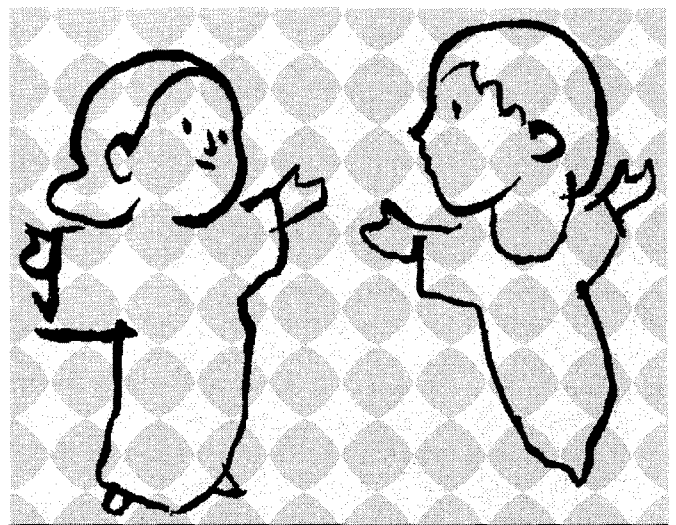
"Yes, that's the cross."

Dragen, when he looks at Jesus on the cross, puts his arms out straight and lowers his head, as if he is imitating the

body position of Jesus crucified. One day Dragen said to me almost in a whisper, "I don't like the cross." This comment took my breath away. I couldn't say anything to him in that moment. The cross is pretty terrible. Dragen has caught the look of agony on the ivory figure of Jesus, the contorted body and twisted face. In that moment suddenly everything in me wanted to get rid of these two crucifixes in this little room. The mother in me wanted to protect these children. I wanted to give them the sunshine Jesus, the "Jesus loves me, this I know" Jesus. I went home that night disturbed.

I later realized that Dragen identifies with Jesus' pain. Dragen, who has had thirty-seven operations in his six short years, who was born with his bladder outside his body, and whose one leg is two inches shorter than the other, has probably endured more physical pain than most of us can imagine. His mother told me that from time to time he doubles up in pain from one medical problem or another. When this happens, she holds him, and they pray for all the children in the world who are worse off than he is, the children who have nothing to eat.

Dragen seems to be entering into the crucifixion. He looks at the cross and assumes the body posture with the contorted face, just for a second or two. I began to see that Jesus is "talking" to Dragen with his body. Broken body to broken body, they are speaking together. Dragen is experiencing Jesus by way of his pain, and I, in my limited understanding, wanted to take that away from him. I didn't know what I was doing, because I didn't know what God was doing.



Lyn Burr Brignoli is a free-lance writer and poet who lives in Greenwich, Connecticut.

This experience has opened my eyes; I can see that, not only in this small room, but everywhere, when God speaks, he speaks to each of us in precisely the language we can understand. He is speaking to Dragen and to Christina in ways uniquely suited to each of them.

No matter what I do, it seems, I can't teach Christina how to kneel. Nor can she make the sign of the cross herself. She loves it when I make the sign of the cross over her, though. Finally, after a period of several weeks, it occurred to me that Christina may never understand how to kneel. But somehow, I don't think God cares if Christina ever learns to kneel or to make the sign of the cross.

My job, as I am coming to see it, is not so much to teach these children the rubrics of faith, as it is just to be with them, to express my faith as relationship: In the words of an Orthodox priest, "God is not an idea to be grasped, but a person to meet." Dragen and Christina bring me back to the "heart"; they remind me that the core of our faith is simple. It is so simple that even eleven-year-old Christina, who can barely make sounds for words, who, for the most part, echoes rather than converses, seems to be responding. She smiles, even giggles when she says the name, "Jesus."

After about four months of "teaching" these children, I was told by Christina's mother that Christina is starting to put words together to make sentences. Whether this is a direct result of our time together, I can't say for sure. But certainly, I am coming to experience each of these children as a *word of God*; in fact, God is speaking to me in a whole new language, or should I say, in two new languages. □

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Richard Alleva

FINAL CURTAIN

Kubrick's 'Eyes Wide Shut'



Not every great artist brings his career to a splendid close. How could they, when few know they're on the way out? (Even the eighty-year-old Verdi considered capping the enchantment of *Falstaff* with a stormy *Lear*.) So let's not mince words about *Eyes Wide Shut*. Stanley Kubrick's swan song turns out to be a squawk. Still, that sound came out of a creature unmistakably a swan. Unlike some other aging titans (I'm thinking of George Stevens and John Ford) whose last efforts were indistinguishable from the work of hacks, Kubrick never completely lost his touch. But that touch turned into a death grip.

For once, the blame can't be loaded onto the original story or even the screenplay derived from it. *Traumnovelle* (*Dream Story*) may not show Arthur Schnitzler in peak form, but it is a compelling psychological study of a husband discombobulated by irrational jealousy. This young doctor realizes that his wife hasn't been unfaithful to him and almost certainly won't be, but her mere daydream of infidelity, with its disclosure of unanticipated erotic depths, proves enough to spur him into the darkness of nocturnal Vienna. His adventures there include a declaration of love from a dead patient's daughter right beside the deathbed; an unconsummated encounter with a prostitute; a Kafkaesque visit to a costumer literally moonlighting as a pimp; and, climactically, his infiltration of a club of upper-class orgiasts from whose clutches he escapes only through the intercession of a masked beauty (an aristocrat? a

courtesan?) declaring herself "ready to redeem him" (with her life? with her sexual abasement?). Although these events are ostensibly real, the hero's consciousness is so exacerbated by jealousy and danger that everything is experienced as delirium. In the cold light of day, he tries to retrace his steps only to discover that his savior may have met a nasty end. Back in his wife's arms and privy to more of her fantasies, the doctor learns to appreciate what is dependable in marriage and to accept what is not.

The dialogue in Frederick Raphael's screenplay, which transposes the action from turn-of-the-century Vienna to contemporary New York, may be trying to echo the psychological waverings of Dr. Bill Harford, but does that excuse all the clunky repetitions? Prostitute: "Come inside with me." Bill: "Come inside with you?" And, once inside, Bill: "What do you recommend?" Prostitute: "What do I recommend?" Is this conversation or a Berlitz lesson? Nevertheless, Raphael has laid out the action in just the way Kubrick always favored, in lengthy, slowly building scenes, and his substitutions of New York's locales and conventions for Vienna's mostly made sense to me. (Reviewers have complained that

no modern husband would be shocked by his wife's sex fantasies, but Raphael makes it clear that Harford is devastated that his wife was ready to dump her marriage and abandon her child to realize a fantasy. The anxiety this might evoke is universal.) There is a solid and exciting story here, but Kubrick's idiosyncrasies, once the trappings of an original sensibility, have hypertrophied to the point where they damage his storytelling.

In Kubrick's films, conversations rarely begin *in medias res*. Rather, he prefers to show the entire arc of encounter: the meeting, the slow engagement or opposition of interests, the complication of tensions, an emotional explosion (or avoidance of it), a simmering down, a definite period. Think of the lacerating Humbert Humbert-Lolita quarrels in his Nabokov adaptation or the smarmy mutual manipulations of Alex the droog and the government minister at the conclusion of *A Clockwork Orange*.

The same method prevails here, but Kubrick seems to have lost his sense of proportion. When the pathetic Marion's declaration of love to the doctor is cut off by her fiancé's arrival, why do we have to watch the newcomer enter the foyer of the townhouse and walk all the way down a long hall to the sickroom? Wouldn't a sense of frustration be better conveyed by the camera staying in the room and a knock on the door interrupting Marion's plea? When Bill, trying to locate a missing friend, interviews a waitress, why does this strictly

informational scene take two minutes to play out when a twenty-second chat would have done the trick? In the face-off between Bill and a millionaire who holds the key to the mystery, why is there so much conversational *bric-à-brac* about shooting pool and appreciating good scotch (delivered amidst some maddeningly fidgety staging) before we get to the matter at hand? If all



the fumbling was meant to increase suspense, it doesn't. This laboriousness kills the story's climax. Bill enters his bedroom and sees the face of a man on the pillow beside his sleeping wife, Alice. He comes closer and realizes that the face is a mask, the very mask he wore to the orgy. The shock and its instant relief lance his jealousy and reduce him to tears and confession. To feel what he's feeling, we must see the mask precisely when Bill sees it and from his point of view. But Kubrick shows us the mask seconds before his hero enters the room, thus dispelling the illusion, diffusing the shock, and impeding the emotional meaning of the scene.

The failure of the climactic scene relates to the movie's overall failure: its lack of inwardness. Schnitzler's material cries out for a treatment in which realism quickly yields to a dreamlike subjectivity. Kubrick has a nice feel for the romance-menace of New York after hours (surprising in an expatriate who hadn't lived in his home town for thirty-five years), but he sets many scenes so coldly before us that we're too aware of elaborately designed sets and carefully choreographed camera movement instead of the turmoil in the hero's mind. Case in point: the orgy, which should evoke a Walpurgis Night, resembles nothing as much as one of those Eurotrash movies of the early seventies, such as *Emmanuelle* and its progeny. Granted, the orgy's participants may be wealthy middle-brows who spent half their adolescence watching *Emmanuelle* and reading *The Story of O*, but we should be experiencing the orgy as Bill does, as temptation and menace and spiteful payback to his wife.

You can always tell when Tom Cruise has been miscast: his bucktoothed stare makes him look like Bugs Bunny. Cruise is good in any role that requires old-fashioned, all-American salesmanship and macho élan, as in *Rain Man* and *Jerry McGuire*. Trying to convey a sensitive man's complex doubts, he's in over his head. Nicole Kidman's failure is mitigated by some good notes she hits in a monologue late in the story, but she gets the crucial early scene of sexual confession wrong. Both Schnitzler and

Raphael make it clear that Alice is upset by her husband's complacent confidence in her faithfulness and his underestimation of her sexuality. But Kidman so overdoes Alice's bitchiness that she seems to be reproaching her husband for being faithful, which isn't her character's intent at all.

In all his films after *A Clockwork Orange*, Kubrick selected and directed his supporting casts with greater care than his stars, and that remains the case here. Though Sydney Pollock vainly churns

away at the role of the piggish millionaire, Rade Sherbedia is delightfully slimy as a pimp and Leelee Sobieski is haunting as his underaged bait. The noted British actor Alan Cumming has a field day spicing a gay desk clerk's matter-of-fact dialogue with unspoken innuendo, while Marie Richardson, giving the only poignant performance, makes Marion quite the most interesting character in the movie.

I think of Kubrick's first commercial film, *Killer's Kiss*. (His previous *Fear*

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and *Desire* was apprentice work, scarcely seen at all.) This gangster movie is nothing but an exercise in moviemaking—Kubrick teaching himself to shoot a boxing match, then a love scene, then a chase, and so forth. As on-the-job training it's successful, but it's not a work of art. Now, forty-five years later, with a lifetime spent making one truly affecting, disturbing film after another, Kubrick has left us a strange memento: another technical exercise, photographed in that slightly veiled style he favored (with a wonderful strawberry-blond tint for the early party scenes), streaked with his usual sardonicism, studded with funny supporting performances that abet that sardonicism, and underlined with music shrewdly excerpted from already composed pieces. Forty-five years of experience and a bigger budget make a difference: *Eyes Wide Shut* is more imposing than *Killer's Kiss*. But not enough of a difference. Neither Kubrick's first film nor his last is a work of art. We must honor everything that came between. □

Behind the Basilica

At noon the sisters hand
them sandwiches and soup.
Since ten, a silent group
has drifted up to stand

in line like broken teeth,
clot still and beaten.
Passers by who've eaten
well don't feel beneath

their soles the bottom line
of hunger perforate
and tear, nor think to wait
upon a meal's divine

forgiveness. Oh ye dead
arisen from the flood
of traffic, take. This blood
is soup, this body bread.

Hank Johnson

STAGE

Celia Wren

DOSTOEVSKI'S SHADOW

'Notes from Underground' & 'Stavrogin'



Fear rarely figures in the theater experience. I'm not talking about the frisson of suspense, or cathartic pity and terror, but real fear: the feeling that you may not make it through to the closing curtain alive.

But there was ample opportunity for trepidation, earlier this summer, in a tiny cellar-turned-stage on New York's Lower East Side. The occasion was a dramatized *Notes from Underground*, performed solo in near obscurity by actor Robert Honeywell, from a script by director Michael Gardner. During seventy-five minutes of delirious pacing, the actor lit and extinguished the candles that provided the only light. Since the space was awash in ink-blotted paper, bearing illegible scrawls, and since Honeywell's role involved skidding back and forth, candle in hand, sometimes barely keeping upright, the tiny audience, seated along the walls, had good reason to cringe. If a few hard-core Dostoevski en-

thusiasts had heard about this no-budget production, the New York City Fire Department, evidently, had not.

The audience, in short, was treated to a dose of angst to rival that of Dostoevski's chronically tortured protagonist. Of course, the quality of the distress was different: The "spiteful" narrator of the 1864 *Notes* suffers existentially, for no good reason except that he is. He wills his own misery, shunning comforts, deliberately alienating sympathy, and behaving irrationally, in order to prove to himself that he is free. Humans will choose choice over happiness, the Underground Man insists, and he glories in his anguish. Misgivings about a fire hazard can hardly compare.

And yet, Gardner's *Notes* did provide the audience with intriguing physical counterparts to the novel's metaphysics. Precarious candles were only the starting point; this Underground Man was really underground, after all, and while ranting about the "wall" (the limits of



human behavior, as predicted by science and sociology), Honeywell was constantly running at full tilt into the walls.

And, to reproduce the book's tortuous monologue, riddled with contradictions and the objections of imagined listeners, Gardner had scripted lines for other voices, which mocked and interrupted the Underground Man's testimony. For the audience, the basement-theater began to feel like the inside of someone's mind—exactly what Gardner intended, as it happens. "The idea," he remarked in a postperformance interview, "was that, as much as theater is about interacting with people in the outside world, so it is about dealing with the voices inside one's head."

The idea may sound odd—we often think of theater as a medium for action—and Underground Man's dictum that the "fruit of consciousness is inertia" seems hardly stage-friendly. But what Dostoevski depicts in *Notes from Underground*—and what Gardner's production, to a certain extent, reproduces—is the drama of consciousness working its way toward either action or inertia.

Self-conscious people know the wrenching deliberations that can precede even trivial actions, like speaking up in a meeting. The drama that divides thought and action must be what T. S. Eliot meant when he wrote that "Between the idea/and the reality...falls the Shadow." The Shadow, the Underground Man would consider, is the experience of choice.

Dostoevski's works may be unlikely fodder for the stage. Most of his novels are sprawling, and their melodrama is knotted up in lengthy conversations about philosophical and theological concepts, or theories on the mystical identity of Russia. But his books do make their way before the footlights. Chicago's Lookingglass Theater Company scored a hit with a 1998 staging of *The Idiot*, and Atlanta's Actors' Express mounted an acclaimed *The Devils* last January, to name just two. Some readers do feel that Dostoevski's writing is intrinsically dramatic. Dostoevski and

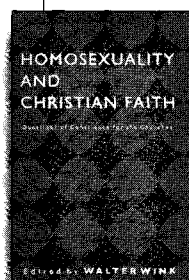
theater are "a perfect match" according to Gardner, who observes that, "as much as he's a philosopher, [Dostoevski] has an innate sense of how one scene connects to another."

Roughly concurrent with the cellar-bound *Notes*, New York's Storm Theater Company mounted *Stavrogin's Confession*, based on a censored chapter from *The Devils* (the director was Peter Dobbins). The scene, in which the antihero Stavrogin visits a monastery to confess to the rape of a child, was so controversial

that it appeared in print only in 1922, after Dostoevski's death. Playwright and actor John Regis, who previously penned a Kabuki-influenced adaptation of *The Idiot*, has turned the episode into an intriguing one-act play that is quintessential Dostoevski: packed with thought and talk about crime, repentance, self-punishment, forgiveness, and pride.

As faultlessly portrayed by Laurence Drozd and Dan Berkey, respectively, Stavrogin and his idiosyncratic confessor, Bishop Tikhon, ushered the mys-

Culture/God/Involvement

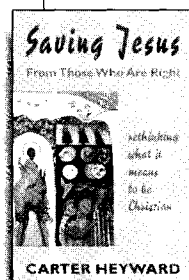


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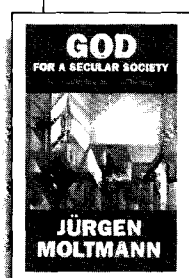


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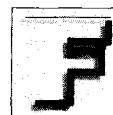
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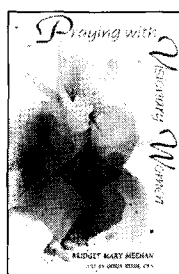
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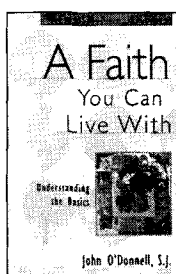
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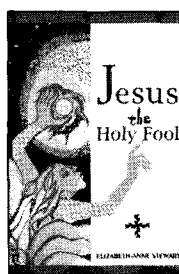
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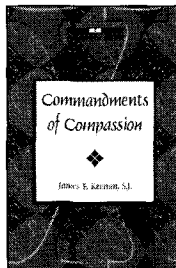
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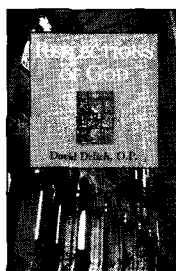
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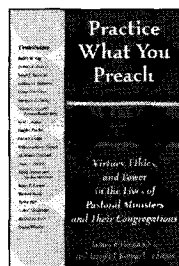
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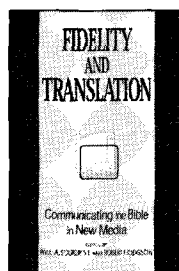
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teries of sin and salvation into the tiny Red Room Theater (situated above an East Village bar). Are we responsible for each other's evil? When do abject remorse and the quest for suffering become a kind of pride? Baiting the monk and spinning out his own shocking confession, Stavrogin opened the floodgates to such questions, presenting the audience with an eerie uncertainty: Either the character was insane, or he was possessed by the devil. Playing a creepily elegant, tense Stavrogin, Drozd exploited this ambiguity; in one particularly effective moment, he lapsed into a trance, abandoning the stage to a pause that, as the seconds ticked by, began to seem increasingly uncanny. Regis, in discussing his play, has remarked on the sinister resonance the character of Dostoevski's nihilist has taken on since the Littleton shootout, and *Stavrogin's Confession* was indeed a wrenching meditation on how embodied the problem of evil can be.

"Is belief in the devil coupled with a complete indifference to God...more acceptable than complete disbelief?" the title character inquired of the bishop at one point. "No. Complete atheism is much more acceptable than such worldly indifference," the bishop retorts, and proceeds to quote Scripture: "Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth."

The play, in which Tikhon critiques Stavrogin's confession on literary grounds, hints at an alternate, aesthetic interpretation for the quote. Risk-taking art, even when it doesn't quite succeed, even when it might appall the fire department, can satisfy more richly than the tidy, crafted kind—art that is safe, but just lukewarm. □

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Recasting the reformer

Martin Luther The Christian between God and Death

Richard Marius

Harvard, \$35, 542 pp.

Eamon Duffy

Richard Marius is one of America's most distinguished Renaissance scholars, and the author of a superlative (and far from hagiographic) biography of Thomas More. He is not a Christian believer, but he is deeply and intuitively sympathetic to the project of sixteenth-century Christian humanism, which Marius sees as an attempt to construct a benign piety and morality which would unite men and women everywhere in mutual understanding, tranquil tolerance, and rational well-doing.

How does such a man write a biography of Martin Luther? For Luther was the ultimate antihumanist. He was, Marius tells us, "an absolutist, demanding certainty in a dark and conflict-ridden world, where nothing is finally sure and mystery abounds against a gloom that may ultimately be driven by fate." In the face of the riddle of existence, Luther abandoned reason for faith, a turn revealed in his conversion in terror, and in his lifelong wrestling with a God from whom he demanded assurance against the dark, and preservation from the sea of oblivion which lashed and plucked at all the living. Marius's Luther is a tumultuous and contradictory personality whom it is hopeless to try to nail down. To make sense of him requires not an effort to decide whether he was right or

wrong, good or bad, but a search for the universal quality in him which "tells us something about the human condition we share in all the centuries."

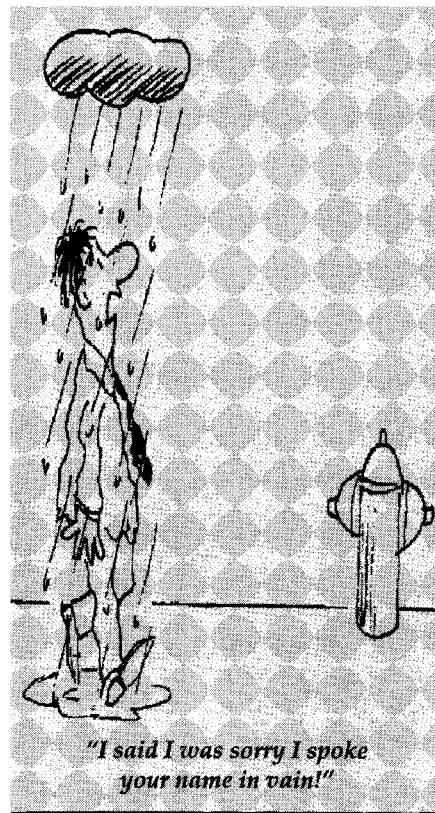
The key to this Luther-for-all-seasons, Marius thinks, is the fear of death. We may be baffled or repelled by sixteenth-century religious convictions—heaven, purgatory, hell, predestination, grace, con- and transubstantiation—all, for the secular men and women for whom Marius writes, as alien as the language and customs of Lilliput. But fear of death is universal, and for Marius it is the heart of Luther's mystery.

This book is therefore a polemic, attacking cultural historians like Lucien Febvre who maintain that atheism was impossible in sixteenth-century Europe. For Marius, radical skepticism about the most fundamental Christian claims was

a byproduct both of the breakdown of medieval religion and of the advent of humanism, the consequence of exposure to pagan art, mythology, and philosophy. The modern doubter can therefore find his doubt prefigured in the religious struggles of the age of Luther. He dwells on the account Luther gave in old age of the skepticism about the relics and legends of Rome which assailed him during his stay there as a young monk. "We are by nature," Luther reflected, "inclined to doubt."

So Marius's Luther is both a craggy and enigmatic man of his time—the last monk of the Middle Ages, the first of the great dogmatists of the Reformation—and also the perennial figure of Everyman, cowering between the immensities, fearfully shouting his message of faith alone into the darkness. For Marius, Luther's worst fear "is not of judgment and hell to follow but merely of death, which he, following Paul, seems to take as annihilation." Heaven, hell, and all the rest of the paraphernalia of the supernatural were ways of articulating and emphasizing the ultimate horror of death, what Newman called "the masterful negation and collapse of all that makes me man." Here Marius thinks Luther stands in radical discontinuity with most late-medieval thought about the last things, focused as it so often was on the material torments of the damned. The whole Reformation message therefore arises out of Luther's struggle with the terror of nonbeing, the struggle "to keep reason at bay and God with us."

This is a tricky framework for any biography of a sixteenth-century man, not merely because it oversimplifies the sophistication of medieval Christian eschatology and exaggerates the gloom of late medieval religion, but most of all because it risks projecting twentieth-cen-



tury concerns and attitudes onto the past. Nevertheless, into this frame Marius weaves a gripping and illuminating narrative, focusing essentially on the reformer's first forty years. Marius has a rare gift for concise exposition, and leads us sure-footedly through Luther's major writings—the lectures on the Psalms, Romans, and Galatians, and, above all, the extraordinary series of Reformation treatises that poured from him in the early 1520s: *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, *Address to the Christian Nobility*, *Liberty of a Christian Man*. Marius's account of these works, informed by a lifetime's study of Renaissance polemic, is clear, shrewd, concise, and sometimes sternly dismissive, but always rewarding. He will have no truck with the efforts made by some of Luther's admirers, like the late great Gordon Rupp, to exculpate Luther from charges of using gutter language and obscenity. He traces in stark and sobering detail Luther's deep-seated hostility to the Jews and their religion, a dishonorable legacy which served to swell "a cultural stream that runs like an open sewer through our history." Marius's Luther is emphatically the fallible man, warts and all.

The limits of Marius's own sympathies with Luther are most evident in his treatment of the famous quarrel with Erasmus in 1525 over the bondage of the will. This debate went to the heart of the Reformation message, and in the course of it Luther rejected the worth of mere human morality, the illusion of moral freedom, and the idea of natural virtue. For Erasmus, who admired Socrates as a saint, such a position drove a wedge between the Christian centuries and the rest of human culture, and worse, it made God into a tyrant. Marius's discussion is detailed and balanced, but it is clear that his sympathies lie with Erasmus. Men in the sixteenth century, he tells us, "were most angry when they were most afraid," and a "vibrating undertone of terror" runs through Luther's writing against Erasmus. Only an absolutist God who could and would override all human ditherings, frailties, and self-deceptions could save Luther: In W.H. Auden's words, "Nothing will

save us that is possible/ We who must die demand a miracle."

Marius admires the energy of will in Luther which refused "to surrender to melancholy and habitual uncertainty, darkly mysterious though the world may be." He admires the frantic energy which made Luther "plunge on in the effort to do what we can against impossible odds to bring what light we can into darkness." But he thinks we need to choose "with more skepticism, tolerance, and care than [Luther's] the instruments of light that we use." Had Luther died immediately after his protest at Worms, we would be better able to admire him, "we would have had a more serene history, less hatred, less bloodshed, less massacre."

This is a less than glowing epitaph,

and this is not a book to delight Luther's admirers. Indeed it is not a book which will satisfy anyone who takes seriously the Reformation as first and foremost a religious and theological movement. For all his close attention to Luther's writings, Marius's Luther is ultimately a secular figure, his religion an exercise in pure existentialism: man at the end of his tether shouting defiance and supplication into the void. It is a remarkable and gripping imaginative creation, but it is not the last word on Luther. □

Eamon Duffy is reader in church history in the University of Cambridge, and a fellow of Magdalene College. He is the author of *The Stripping of the Altars*, and *Saints and Sinners: A History of the Popes*, both published by Yale University Press.

A GOD'S-EYE VIEW

For the Time Being

Annie Dillard

Knopf, \$22, 204 pp.

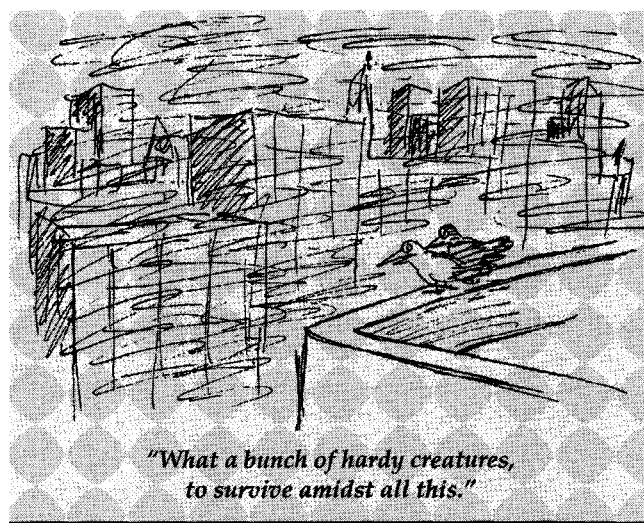
Peggy Rosenthal

In 1982, Annie Dillard found herself, as part of a tour group in China, standing above

the excavation site of thousands of life-sized clay soldiers, modeled individually on each member of the imperial army and buried twenty-two hundred years ago. "I saw what looked like human bodies coming out of the earth," she writes. "The earth was yielding these bodies...; it grew and bore them. The

clay people were earth itself, only shaped. The hazards of time had suspended their bodies in the act of pressing out into the air." Then she reflects: "Seeing the broad earth under the open sky, and a patch of it sliced into deep corridors from which bodies emerge, surprises many people to tears. Who would not weep from shock? I seemed to see our lives from the aspect of eternity. I seemed long dead and looking down."

This is her predominant stance in *For the Time Being*: looking at human life from



high above, as if outside time, yet peering deep into minute details on the surface of the earth and even below, down into layers of past civilizations buried under the dirt. She has worked hard to find images, incidents, and statistics—as well as quotations from other ponderers of life's meaning—that together can convey something of the mystery of the utter uniqueness of each of us individuals and yet our apparently complete dispensability through the grand sweep of time. And she succeeds. I've never read anything, with the exception of parts of the Bible, that gives me more of a sense of how earth and human life on it might look from the viewpoint of God, to whom (in the words of Psalm 90) "a thousand years are as a day" and yet who knows me personally and cares for me "through and through" (Psalm 139).

Of the other great ponderers that Dillard draws on, her favorites are Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and the Kabbalistic-Hasidic thinkers, especially the Baal Shem Tov. She loves Teilhard because he had his hands in the dirt. His famous *Phenomenon of Man* she dismisses as "crackpot"; for her, he is first and foremost "the paleontologist," discoverer of the Pleistocene Age *Homo erectus*, Peking Man. From Teilhard's archeological field notes, Dillard appreciatively reproduces comments like "More than three thousand years before our era, people were living there who played with dice like our own." Precisely because Teilhard was so immersed in matter, he could eventually say, "Throughout my whole life, during every minute of it, the world has been gradually lighting up and blazing before my eyes until it has come to surround me, entirely lit up from within." That is, he came—from a very different direction—to a vision close to the Baal Shem Tov's: that in every bit of God's creation is hidden a "holy spark."

For the Time Being intermixes these materials with a range of other kinds: observations of particular clouds (forms that, eerily resembling humans, take shape over the earth for an instant, then dissipate forever); Dillard's own travel notes from visits to China and Israel, the places

that ground (so to speak) Teilhard and the Kabbalists; jolting statistics she has dug up (like "a hundred million of us are children who live on the streets...two thousand of us a day commit suicide"); and more. All these bits and pieces are for Dillard the material through which she keeps pushing her basic questions of who we are, why we are here, and how God figures in it all. She is as much the archeologist as Teilhard, uncovering fragments of meaning and putting them together to puzzle out what we humans are doing during our history on this earth.

The careful way Dillard chooses, juxtaposes, and re-arranges her fragments proves her a master of the currently fashionable "mosaic" essay form that

she used with such success, on a smaller scale, in her widely read "An Expedition to the Pole" in *Teaching a Stone to Talk* (1982). Redeeming the fragment-unit created when modernism (and then commercial TV) chopped up the world of integrated meaning, *For the Time Being* can be seen as one of the culminating literary works of its era. It does for its period what *Middlemarch*, say, did for the Victorians: take the period's characteristic prose form (the multi-volume novel in George Eliot's case) and craft it to dramatize compellingly the age's best wisdom. The intricate complexities of *For the Time Being's* structure (the poetic interplay of themes and images, grouped in chapters totaling the symbolic number seven) are more than I can

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detail here; dissertations to come will be explicating them, for Dillard's stature in American letters is approaching that of her precursor poet-essayist-transcendentalists, Thoreau and Emerson. I can imagine literary history, down the road, naming her the chief of a movement called Neo-Transcendentalism.

Perhaps her one structural mistake in *For the Time Being* was to open with a description of a pair of bird-headed dwarfs, drawn from a human birth-defects manual. For her book's integrity, it's a perfect choice: Dillard's hallmark has always been finding just the right image to shock us into truly visualizing her theme, in this case the very definition of being human. But some readers are so appalled by the image that they can't go on, or else they forge ahead under the mistaken impression that Dillard's purpose is to rail against God for creating such horrors.

An additional stumbling block, for those readers who are nonbelievers, is that God is quite calmly and frankly a given of Dillard's meditative probings throughout the book. (The *New York Times Book Review*, oddly, assigned the book to a self-identified "atheist," who could make no sense of it and so misread almost everything about its tone and meaning.) Dillard is sure, with Psalm 24, that the earth and its fullness are God's. What she's less sure of, and interrogates from ever-new angles, is whether natural and moral evils (a deadly tidal wave, say, or the ancient Romans' cruel flaying of an elderly rabbi) are therefore God's doing, and where precisely human action should come in. How are we to live, she asks (and answers) in a hundred eye-opening ways: How do we help release the sparks of the holy in our brief time here?

"Teach us to know the shortness of our life, to number our days aright," Psalm 90 begs of God, "that we may gain wisdom of heart." The latest text we've been given to learn from—a gift of wisdom for our own time—is *For the Time Being*. □

Peggy Rosenthal has, most recently, co-edited the anthology *Divine Inspiration: The Life of Jesus in World Poetry* (Oxford).

THE WORD OF RECORD

The Bible and the New York Times

Fleming Rutledge
Eerdmans, \$20, 243 pp.

Robert P. Imbelli

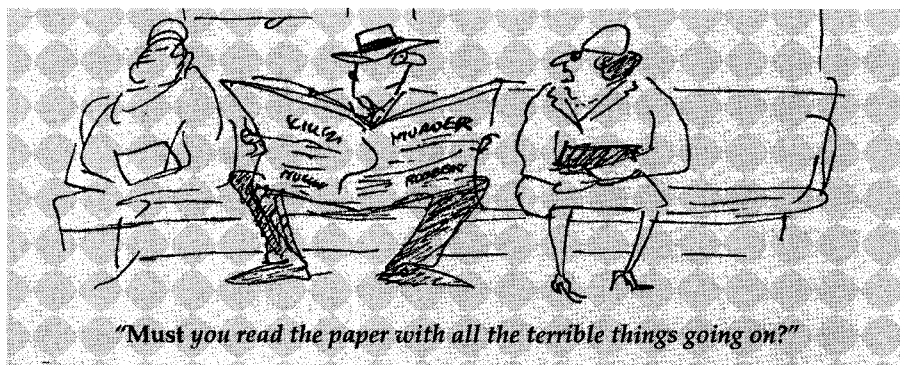
Recently, while preparing a Sunday sermon, I came upon a quote from the English novelist P.D. James. "Sermons," opined James, "are the most ephemeral of prose writings." Clearly not a sentiment destined to enhance the preacher's self-esteem. Still, I must confess to being a surreptitious reader of collected sermons, for both personal edification and professional stimulus. As the Spirit moves, I dip into Augustine or Bernard, Newman or Barth. Now I gratefully add a new and distinctive voice of homiletic inspiration and instruction: Fleming Rutledge.

Rutledge, a priest of the Episcopal church, has published her fine collection of sermons under the Barth-inspired title, *The Bible and the New York Times*. "Barth-inspired," because it echoes the great theologian's persuasion that the preacher must undertake his or her awesome duty with the Bible in one hand and the daily newspaper in the other. From this perspective, then, the preacher's task is "ephemeral." It

seeks nothing less than to relate the biblical Word to the "everyday," thus actualizing the Word and enlivening the everyday with God's presence and call.

Indeed, the ongoing challenge and responsibility of our entire Christian life is to realize (in the strong sense intended by Newman) the Word of God in the everyday of faith. "If today you hear God's voice, harden not your hearts," the psalmist proclaims and warns. And the church daily takes up this cry as it begins the Prayer of the Hours. Now the preacher bears, as Barth insisted, a crucial ministry. He or she must enter into "the strange new world of the Bible" and wrestle with the Word (as Jacob did with the angel) in order to bring forth a blessing of transforming judgment and grace. The *Times*, on the other hand, represents the multiple worlds that form and often deform the lives of God's people. As the graphics of the book's cover illustrate and as the sermons themselves testify, Bible and newspaper do not receive here equal billing. The evangelical call to conversion holds the primacy: the renewal of minds and hearts according to the pattern of Christ.

One difficulty every preacher must confront is the sheer familiarity of the biblical narrative: whether that of Adam and Eve, Abraham, or Moses; whether the wedding at Cana, the parable of the Good Samaritan, or even the Crucifixion. In every case "repetition threatens to make the story stale." In the face of this, Rutledge's sermons manifest a two-fold



strategy. They employ serious exegetical study to unveil the originality and distinctiveness of the biblical text, disclosing riches unsuspected by superficial familiarity. They show, as well, a preacher adept at evoking the telling incident from daily life that puts the biblical story into strikingly new relief.

A further difficulty the preacher in contemporary American society must contend with is our culture's relentless consumerism which co-opts and converts to its own purpose all sacred traditions, leaving nothing sacred in its wake. Of necessity, then, Rutledge's sermons, like the Word they proclaim, flash with the sharpness of a two-edged sword. The fine series of Advent sermons celebrates a liturgical season "designed to show that the meaning of Christmas is diminished to the vanishing point if we are not willing to take a fearless inventory of the darkness." And the splendid Easter sermon, "Strange Ending, Unthinkable Beginning," announces to a culture, drifting "farther and farther away from its Christian moorings," the earth-shattering news that "there is all the difference in the world between the return of nature's glory in spring and the resurrection of the dead."

The sermons, though frequently mordant, are never morose. For they joyfully magnify and extol the triumph of grace, the grace "much more abounding" that Paul proclaims in Romans. Clearly, then, these sermons are not merely biblically based, they are biblically normed: and the norm is Christ. "We come together," Rutledge reminds the liturgical assembly, "to hear the living voice of a living Lord, who has passed through the domain of death and hell and emerged victorious, bearing the keys with him. He has the words of eternal life." The rhythms of the liturgical year and its lectionary cycle give this gifted preacher full freedom and scope to present the mystery of Christ's person in all its manifold depth as Lord of the church and savior of the world.

Grace abounding, then; free—but not cheap, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, another student of Barth, memorably put it. Rutledge presses the refrain: "Putting on

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Christ is risky, of course. It means laying oneself open to being made new." It means acknowledging the wayward desires and ever-ready deceits that structure the unredeemed self, the idolatries that serve to defend our self-enclosed worlds. It summons us to open ourselves to the transforming and merciful fire of God's grace in Christ. "The Christian theme of common solidarity in sin and unrighteousness is a uniquely liberating message," Rutledge affirms in "Clint's Got It," as she applauds Clint Eastwood's recognition in his movie *Unforgiven* that "we all have it coming!" But then she deftly converts this world-weary confession into graced new beginning by embracing the inspired malapropism of *Much Ado About Nothing*: "O villain! Thou wilt be condemned into everlasting redemption."

If Rutledge is correct in her discernment of our culture's continuing spiritual drift (and I, for one, believe she is), then my quirky habit of surreptitious sermon reading may no longer function merely *ad libitum*. It may soon become a matter of indispensable spiritual sustenance, somewhat like biblical manna in a contemporary wilderness that now stretches over all ten Sunday sections of "the newspaper of record." Nor do I stand alone in this assessment. Usually the blurbs that publishers dredge up to decorate their new releases have the tinny ring of canned endorsements. By contrast, reading the recommendations on the back cover of *The Bible and the New York Times*, one marvels at the impressive range of contributors (including the late Raymond Brown) and the heart-felt quality of their reviews. Let me close, then, by appropriating words of Annie Dillard that suggest the prose of these sermons may not be so ephemeral after all. "This is beautiful, powerful, literary writing. Fleming Rutledge writes as a person who knows she is dying, speaking to other dying people, determined not to enrage by triviality." Not enrage by triviality? And the people cried: "Amen!" □

Robert P. Imbelli, a priest of the archdiocese of New York, teaches theology at Boston College.

A LISTENER'S GUIDE

Human Voices Penelope Fitzgerald

Houghton Mifflin Company, \$12, 160 pp.

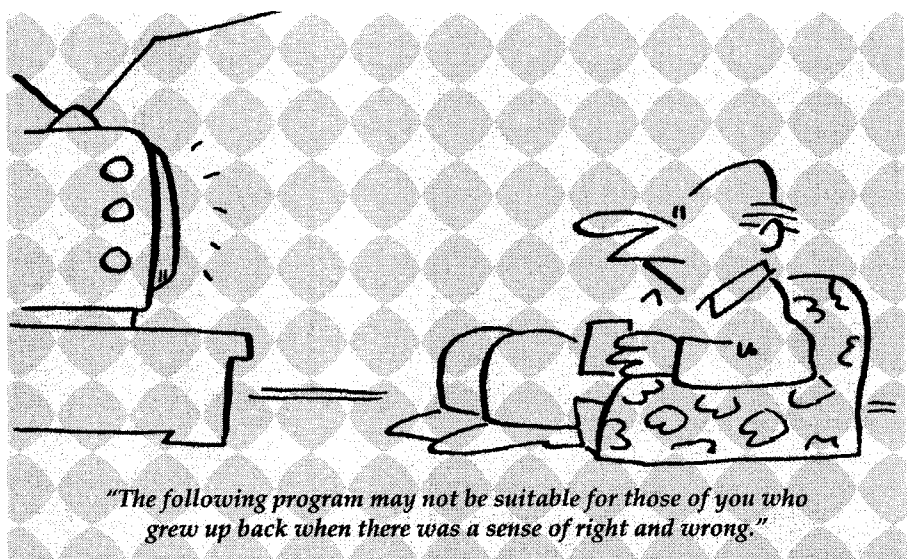
Edward T. Wheeler

The trouble with memory "is that it develops its own defenses, against truth telling and in consequence against history"—so writes the eighty-three-year-old Penelope Fitzgerald, an adult witness to the Battle of Britain, in reviewing a recent book on London during the Blitz. Fitzgerald faced these problems, truth telling and memory's defenses, as a novelist in *Human Voices*, published almost twenty years ago in Britain and issued in the United States this spring for the first time. The novel, set in the BBC's Broadcasting House, attempts to record the truth of human voices against the lies of war, those "consolations" by which government radio hides or distorts what is happening. In the process, the book cannot but also raise the paradoxical relationship between fact and fiction: how can fiction be true? So heavy a philo-

sophic weight might seem too much for so brief a work to bear, but its extraordinary style turns the tension in the paradox into a genuine aesthetic pleasure—even if the paradox itself goes unresolved.

But first, who is Penelope Fitzgerald and why is her twenty-year-old novel being reprinted? Much honored in Britain (Booker Prize winner in 1979, and shortlisted three times), Fitzgerald received acclaim here only recently for *The Blue Flower*, a historical novel on the life of Novalis, the German Romantic poet. She took a first-class degree in English from Oxford, married in 1941, and published her first work of fiction (still unavailable in the United States) when she was sixty-one. Before turning to novels she had written biographies of the painter Edward Coley Burne-Jones and of her illustrious uncles, the brothers Knox, including the Scripture scholar and Catholic convert, Ronald. Her father was, for a time, editor of *Punch*. In raising her three children, she resided in England and abroad, in circumstances sufficiently unusual to give her subjects for her work.

Fitzgerald is an uncanny, if understated, stylist. Her style is so distinctive that the novels give pleasure by making us ask how she achieves her effects.



Those works of hers set outside England or beyond the immediate past (late eighteenth-century Germany, prerevolutionary Moscow, postwar Italy, Cambridge ca. 1912) abound with a detail, domestic and social, that makes fiction read like fact. *Commonweal* readers might particularly enjoy the sections of *Innocence* (1986) that take a wry look at Vatican politics through the aspirations of one Monsignor Gondi.

"I try to get the movement and counter-movement of the novel and its background to go together," Fitzgerald writes. "*Human Voices* was set in Broadcasting House in the old days of wartime radio, and the narration as far as possible is through voices and music." Memory and its defenses, truth telling, the honest sound of the human voice—these dilemmas and textures circulate thematically through the book, which is a love story, an ironically detailed recollection of Fitzgerald's own time at the BBC, a quirky and puzzling study of characters who are somehow beyond our comprehension and all the more human for this. It is also a tribute to Broadcasting House, which is conceived metaphorically as a kind of great ocean liner navigating the turbulent seas of war in the early forties. (Edward R. Murrow, in the form of the character Mac McVitie, rushes on and off as the bombs fall.)

Episodic is not the right term for Fitzgerald's style, nor is collage a correct way to describe the accumulation of scenes and bits of dialogue that characterize the work. Perhaps her own ocean liner metaphor is apt: the plot steams along taking characters to their ends; the occasional shock of emotional waves reminds us that we are under-way. The novelist moves from deck to deck, cabin to cabin, recording, commenting sparingly, and letting the enigmatic quality of the dialogue provide the truth telling.

"Annie! If the summer had not been fine, there might have been no blackberries."

"Of course there mightn't," said Annie. "You're just making worries for yourself, Mr. Waterlow. There isn't anything at all that mightn't be otherwise."

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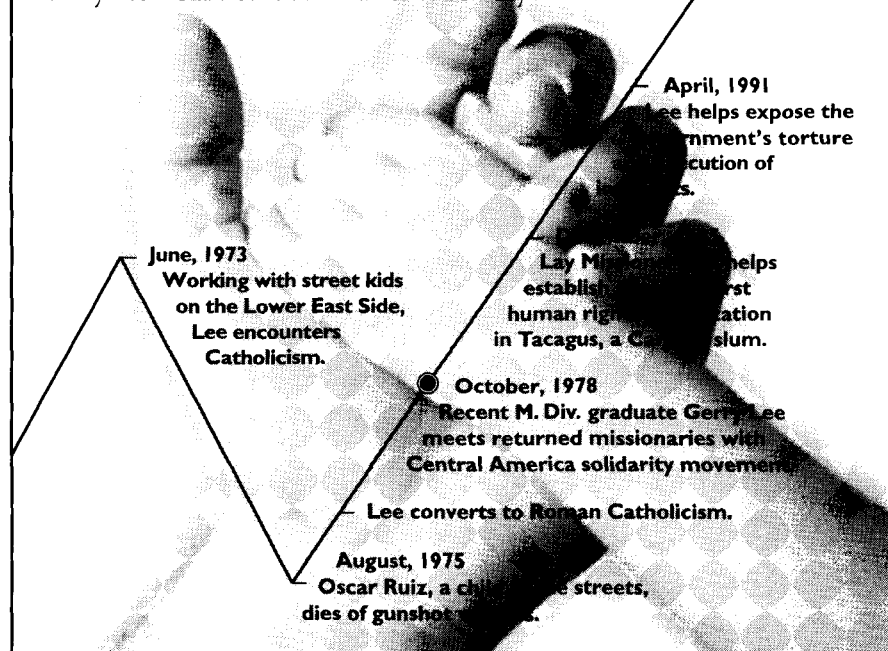
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After all, I mightn't . . . what I mean is, how can they find anything else to broadcast that's got to be true, and couldn't be anything else?"

As this quotation suggests, Annie, the heroine of the love story, has an impenetrable resourcefulness; she shows as much faith in the workings of the BBC as she does courage in her own apparently fruitless devotion to her boss, Sam Brooks. We are not given much more sense of what motivates her—or for that matter what happens after her confession of her love to Sam, the RPD. (The BBC's notorious alphabet abbreviation is another aspect of the novel's truthfulness; it takes a few rereadings of the first twenty pages to distinguish the RPD [Recorded Program Director], from the DPP [Director of Program Planning], from the RPAs [Recorded Program Assistants] at BH [Broadcasting House].) There is interior monologue or approximate omniscient narration, but the effect of the style is one of distance rather than intimacy. We have dotty inconsequentiality, hilarity shared but somehow private, a point of view which is skewed to the eccentric, and a style which has the abruptness of bombs exploding and changing the contour of a neighborhood—but the noise and the explosions have happened the night before. We were not there and witness the aftereffects in the riddling dialogue and the abrupt changes of scene.

On occasion, the novelist as captain, does let us know what is happening:

"As an institution they could not tell a lie, they were unique in the contrivances of gods and men since the Oracle at Delphi...they were broadcasting in the strictest sense of the word, scattering human voices into the darkness of Europe, in the certainty that more than half must be lost....And every one who worked there, bitterly complaining...felt a certain pride which they had no way to express, either then or since."

Human Voices is, we must believe, the expression of that pride in the scattering of seeds of truth. □

Edward T. Wheeler is the dean of the faculty at the Williams School in New London, Connecticut.

MASS APPEAL

The Unread Vision The Liturgical Movement in the United States of America: 1926–55

Keith F. Pecklers

The Liturgical Press, \$24.95, 333 pp.

Rembert G. Weakland

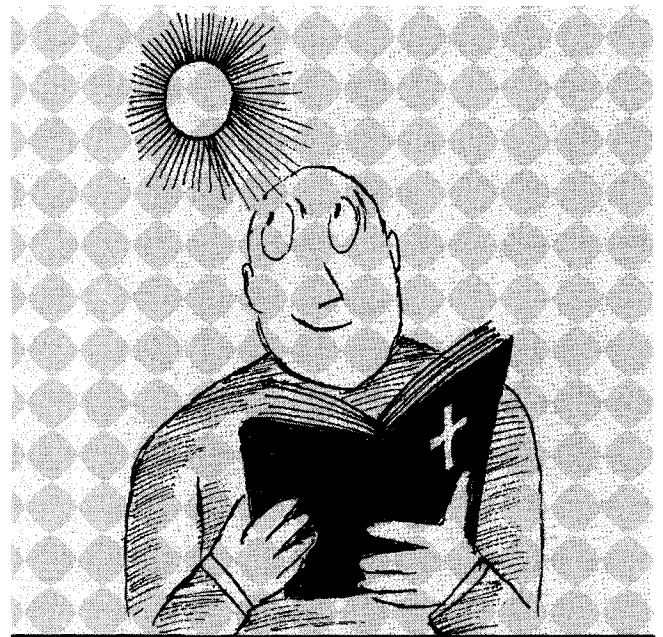
In hindsight many writers assert that it would have been better if the Second Vatican Council had not begun with such a sensitive subject as liturgy. They often add that liturgy should have been treated after the completion of the document on the church, since any change in liturgy should have reflected the newer emphases in ecclesiology. Some also claim that the faithful were totally unprepared for these changes, that these represented the views of but a few scholars working at their desks in German universities or in monastic cells.

Yet, the bishops felt at ease in beginning with the schema on liturgy. At least in Europe, the bishops had had sufficient acquaintance with the liturgical movement to see liturgy as ripe for some major decisions. This schema received the most thorough debate of any document of the council, since the procedures had not yet evolved and everyone had several chances to express his opinions on every sentence and paragraph. On Decem-

ber 4, 1963, the definitive vote on the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* took place with an overwhelming vote of 2,147 affirmative and 4 negative. Pope Paul VI then proceeded to promulgate the document. The unanimity of the bishops was encouraging and gave hope for the whole council.

All of these facts might seem surprising in the light of subsequent developments and current controversies. How well prepared were the bishops and how well prepared were the faithful for these liturgical changes? Keith Pecklers's excellent study seeks to answer this question for the United States. All the liturgical ferment here before the council, both the events and the people that created them, are thoroughly discussed. For those of us who lived through many of those events, reading the book is a nostalgic trip into a moment that was full of excitement and promise.

First, the European roots of the liturgical movement are examined, with ideas coming from Belgium and France, Germany and Austria. Next, how those ideas reached the church here, especially through the work of Father Virgil



Michel O.S.B., is outlined in detail. Nevertheless, one would have to say that the liturgical movement "caught on" more in the areas of the country with a heavy German immigrant population than on the East Coast with its stronger Irish influences. The Midwest, under the influence of Saint John's Abbey in Collegeville, Minnesota, and a few pastors of German origin, became the center of the liturgical movement in the United States. Although the roots were often European and scholarly, the people involved were from all walks of church life. Pecklers states: "As in Europe, the American movement was fostered by Benedictines, but unlike its European counterpart, it was not overly academic or theological in nature. Rather, it was fundamentally a pastoral, grassroots development within the church."

Nevertheless, that development was uneven and did not prepare many segments of the American Catholic population. It was considered an elitist movement by many in the hierarchy and a divisive one. During the debate on liturgy at the first days of the council, the interventions by Cardinals Spellman and McIntyre showed that they had not been influenced the least bit by this movement.

After describing the European origins of the liturgical movement, Pecklers does not treat the movement in the United States chronologically but divides his study into four thematic areas: participation, social justice, education, and the arts. He rightly points out that many of the European ethnic groups were well prepared for the introduction of the vernacular because of the practice of the "Singmesse," a tradition of singing, especially in German, Slovak, Polish, and other middle European languages, hymns that corresponded to the various parts of the Mass. (My earliest "job" as an organist in 1939 at the age of twelve was in a Slovak parish in my hometown in Pennsylvania where the "Singmesse" in Slovak was regular Sunday fare.) In addition to the growth of the Vernacular Society—a movement that did not involve many people—the general lack of education in Latin among the ethnic immigrants made introduction of the

vernacular a natural phenomenon in the United States, in spite of the wide use of the daily and Sunday missals for the laity that abounded in those days.

The surprising chapter in Pecklers's study, however, is the one on social justice. The early liturgical movement in the United States, mostly through the emphasis on the Mystical Body of Christ, was very much a part of the justice movement as well. Not just Father Virgil Michel but also Fathers Hans A. Reinhold and Reynold Hillenbrand

played important roles in integrating justice issues and liturgical renewal. Pecklers writes: "Reynold Hillenbrand rightly deserves credit for Chicago's leading role in American Catholic liturgical and social activism, but Chicago's centrality was not only because of Hillenbrand. Although liturgists and social activists like Dan Cantwell, Jack Egan, Pat and Patty Crowley, Bernard Laukemper, Ed Marciniak, Joseph Morrison, Sara Benedicta O'Neill, Nina Polcyn, and John K. Ross-Duggan were influenced directly or indirectly by Hil-

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*—Karen Oddi
Indianapolis*



lenbrand, they made very significant contributions on their own. Together, these Chicago Catholics formed a network that extended far beyond the shores of Lake Michigan." The social justice aspect of the liturgical renewal was lost in the period after World War II as Catholics moved out of the inner cities to the suburbs and forgot their interest in social questions.

From my point of view, Pecklers is right in rejecting historian James F. White's view that the liturgical move-

ment was highly influenced by Protestantism and thus flourished most in the Midwest. Closer to the truth is the fact that that area of the country had closer bonds to the liturgical centers of Europe, to Maria Laach and Beuron, to Maredsous and Mont César, through the work of the pioneer monks of Saint John's Abbey in Collegeville, and their publication *Orate Fratres*, now *Worship*.

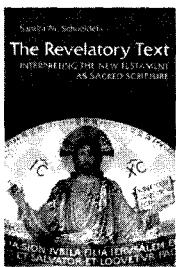
Even if the preparation here in the United States for the liturgical renewal of Vatican II was uneven, it was full of

excitement and freshness. Pecklers catches that spirit perfectly in this well-written and well-documented work. The loss of that excitement several decades after the council will have to be documented by someone else a few decades from now. I hope it is done with the same thoroughness and perception that Pecklers brings to the pre-conciliar period. □

Rembert G. Weakland, O.S.B., is archbishop of Milwaukee.

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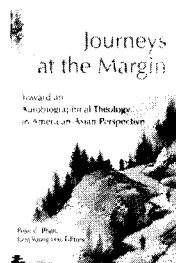
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CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 4)

that want to do business in Cuba, or to take advantage of cheap labor there; (4) there is no evidence that trade with Cuba helps anyone outside the ruling class; (5) the embargo was originally presented and is still seen as a more humane alternative than war and preferable to doing nothing about human-rights abuses. The last course of action is defended in the name of respecting sovereignty, but this is little comfort to those who are persecuted.

Yes, the embargo has failed, and should never have been applied to medicines. But let us not seek its termination without an alternative means of restoring human rights in Cuba. As we allow tourists to patronize Cuban hotels where Cubans themselves are not allowed to enter, let us not pretend that this is being done out of friendship for the people.

PEDRO J. SAAVEDRA
Kensington, Md.

The author replies:

The embargo is not a "humane alternative" to a person deprived of life-saving medicines, and I believe food should never be used as a weapon, particularly by the wealthiest and most powerful nation on earth.

I do not defend Cuba's human-rights record, but if individual freedom is the issue I question why our government has no trade restrictions against a repressive regime like China's.

BRIAN BROWN

Let's clone Kevin Doyle

Maurice Timothy Reidy's biographical sketch of Kevin Doyle ["Doyle for the Defense," August 13] did this old Irish Catholic heart good. Would that we had a Capital Defender Office in every state that allows capital punishment, and a defender in the model of Mr. Doyle occupying it.

I see in Mr. Doyle a younger version of my dad, Joe McCann. A captain in the Pennsylvania State Police in the 1940s and 1950s, he was governed by that same potent mixture which is the bright side of Irish heritage: a deep Catholic faith and a strong sense of social justice.

My sisters and I had the great good fortune to grow up in a household where justice issues sparked the dinner table conversation. The Sisters of Mercy who taught us in high school were wonderful women academics who nourished this same spirit. Sister Sylvanus cultivated the reading of *Commonweal*, *America*, *Integrity*, and the *Catholic Worker* in her English classes. Our youth was an exciting, mind-forming environment.

Now, fifty years later, my concern for Catholic culture in the United States is that we stand at risk of losing our best collective voice. If an empty secularity and New Age spirituality supplant the rich heritage of an expansive and grounded faith coupled with commitment to the common good as formative elements in Catholic life, a pearl of great price will have been lost.

SISTER PATRICIA MCCANN, R.S.M.
Pittsburgh, Pa.

Doyle's challenge

Thank you for Maurice Timothy Reidy's fine portrait of the remarkable Kevin Doyle. I am privileged to serve with Kevin on the National Center for the Laity's Council of Advisors. I have read him in the pages of *Commonweal* and heard him speak to audiences of hundreds and a handful. In any venue, Doyle commands your attention—whether or not you agree with him on any particular issue—because of his eloquent

and impassioned articulation of his beliefs.

What I admire most about Doyle's public persona is his willingness to live in the breach between the staked-out positions of "the Left" and "the Right." His intellectual honesty in seeking out the truth of the matter is an increasingly rare commodity in our public discourse.

Doyle's experience of the institutional church—mediated through his parents, parish, and Catholic educa-

tion—has produced in him an unyielding respect for the dignity of each person, a love of justice, concern for society's marginalized, and intellectual rigor. He is right to challenge us all to stop hiding this exquisite gift of faith under a bushel. We should all let it shine.

KATHLEEN MCGARVEY Hidy
Cincinnati, Ohio

Amen, amen

I thoroughly enjoyed Maurice Timo-



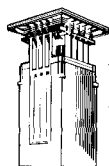
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thy Reidy's article. Our church and society need more people like Kevin Doyle, who not only espouses his religious and moral convictions but lives by them. Let us have more of this kind of coverage. JOSEPH EULIE
New Paltz, N.Y.

Open those files

As Robert White points out ["Re-thinking Foreign Policy," June 4], earlier this year Guatemala's courageous truth commissioners dared to indict their own government for its massacres of entire Mayan communities. The commissioners also denounced our government for financing, training, and arming the Guatemalan military in these murderous campaigns that were cold war business-as-usual for the United States over a period of decades in Central America.

White is on target when he calls for a United States truth commission on the model of those created in El Salvador and Honduras as well as Guatemala. A full accounting is long overdue, especially since the United States continues to provide non-democratic regimes with arms and military training.

Though we cannot bring back the dead in Central America, we can help bring justice to the living by supporting the Human Rights Information Act (H.R. 1625), which would declassify U.S. government documents about human-rights violations in Guatemala and Honduras, thereby helping victims' families reach closure, aiding in prosecutions, and strengthening the rule of law.

BARBARA BOCEK
Forks, Wash.

The writer is Guatemala coordinator for Amnesty International-USA.

Not a martyr

Your editorials are generally on target, insightful, instructive, and careful. But your use of the word "martyrdom" in referring to the death of John F. Kennedy ["An Eerie Echo," August 13] is not well advised. No evidence has been produced indicat-

ing that the president was murdered for his public witness to the Christian faith. President Kennedy may have taken his religious faith very seriously, but he did not die for it. Real martyrdom is too precious a reality to be spoken of carelessly.

EDWARD F. DOHERTY
Flushing, N.Y.

Fading into the crowd

The final sentences of the editorial "An Eerie Echo" [August 13] brought to mind some words of a brilliant Catholic layman, Gustave Corcao, about the time of Vatican Council II. Lamenting "the appalling average-ness of the average Catholic," he wrote:

"It is not that our lives are marked by flagrant scandal, or that we are more vicious or selfish than others. It is not that we are less scrupulous than the other fellow. The greatest scandal of our times is that we are like everybody else. In its confused and disorderly indictment the world accuses us of this strange, collective, nameless sin. The world accuses us of worldliness...[It] knows that we are committed to follow the bloody footsteps of a God who endured a Passion for me; it knows that our flag is a sign of contradiction; it knows that we are scheduled to be counted as fools; and knowing that, it is not surprised that we are guilty of this or that humiliating sin or of some evil which is the consequence of weakness but that we live by the same standards as does the world and that we glory in its prestige."

Without pointing any fingers, but striking the breast, it seems to me these words have a validity for today.

JOHN B. PESCE, C.P.
West Hartford, Conn.

From the editors: The editorial remarked that, following election day in 1960, it turned out that "Catholics...were more like the rest of America than either they or the rest of America imagined. That remains, it seems fair to say, both a blessing and a challenge."

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MR. QUILISMA

A.W. Godfrey

It seems easy to forget what it was like being Catholic prior to World War II. It was a long time ago and American Catholics are different now. They have become an integral part of the American fabric and enjoy positions of leadership at every level. Before Vatican II, parish life in the large cities was ethnic and homogeneous. Remote priests presided over obedient flocks that lacked the information or inclination to question the standardized mediocrity of the liturgy and the poor quality of sacred music, which specialized in saccharine hymns written in waltz time. Church décor, too, at least in New York, was dull to garish, with the furnishings supplied by the ecclesiastical hardware stores on Barclay Street.

Nonetheless, between the world wars there were stirrings among the laity who had seen something in Europe. They realized that good art and good liturgy were not incompatible with devotion and piety, and that intellect and good taste could prevail over superstition and sentimentality. They also believed that as Christians they had to be involved in the solution of social problems. Their convictions and activities were prelude to the renewal of Vatican II that enabled its reforms to take root quickly in this country.

One of the heroes of this formative era was Maurice Lavanoux (1894–1974), the first and only editor of *Liturgical Arts* magazine. Lavanoux was a self-taught curmudgeon of impeccable taste who was educated in French Canada and France before World War I. (His parents had been displaced from Alsace-Lorraine by the Franco-Prussian War.) After several draftsman's jobs in architects' offices, he enlisted in the French Foreign Legion. Photographs of that period show a dashing legionnaire who

was in fact a failure as a soldier. After the war, Lavanoux remained in Paris to study at the Beaux Arts, then went to New York to work for several architects.

The Liturgical Arts Society was founded almost by accident in 1928 after a retreat at the Benedictine priory at Portsmouth, Rhode Island. *Liturgical Arts* began publication shortly afterward and was edited by Lavanoux for forty years. In the end, it ceased publication because the editor was not properly deferential to a wealthy patron whose ideas differed from his, nor was he willing to change the progressive format of the magazine.

Liturgical Arts, however, was more than a magazine. It was a forum for people who wrote Lavanoux from all over the world, stopped in at his small and cluttered office, and participated in the Monday-night dinner meetings of the Quilisma Club. The "club," named after a jagged note in Gregorian chant, gathered weekly to chant and, as Saint Benedict urged, to "pray twice." The group, varying between ten and twenty, met in the back rooms of local restaurants and chanted for an hour before a long and leisurely dinner with wide-ranging discussions on politics, theology, and church art and architecture throughout the world.

Lavanoux was a listener and synthesizer. Consequently, *Liturgical Arts* published more than dry articles about buildings, liturgy, and church music. It discussed society, the role of the laity in the church, and the stirrings for economic and social justice throughout the world. The bases of Lavanoux's convictions were French, especially the writings of Léon Bloy, Georges Bernanos, Charles Péguy, and Jacques Maritain.

Liturgical Arts and the Quilisma Club became one of the points of contact, a "course of honors" that many Catholics, especially converts, coming to New

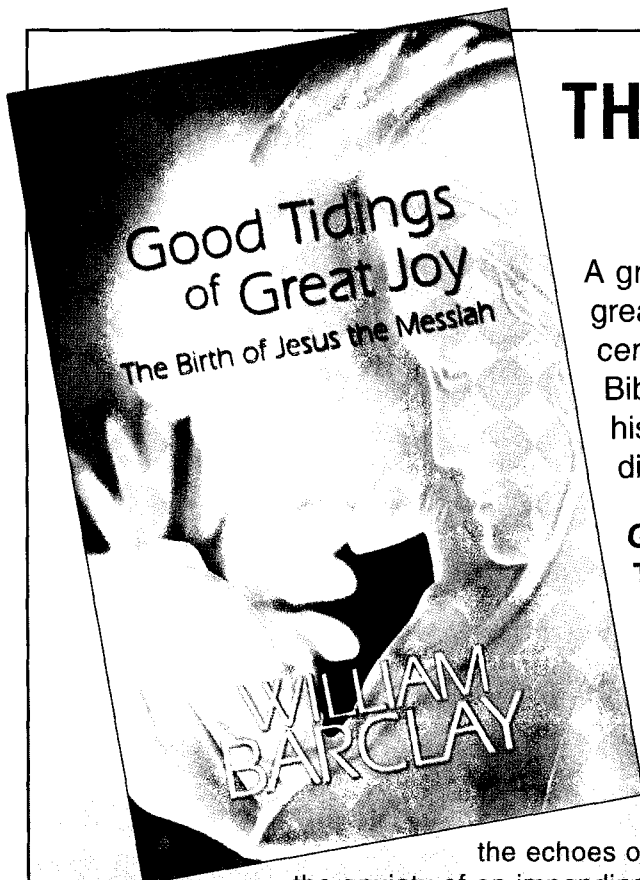
York for the first time after World War II, got to know. Others were *Commonweal*, Friendship House, and the Catholic Worker, all of which grappled with the changes that were stirring in the church which became a reality with Vatican II. John La Farge, Clement McNaspy, and Joseph Foley were chaplains over the years and provided solid spiritual leadership.

The era during which *Liturgical Arts* was published appeared to be a time when little was happening. It was, however, a watershed during which the foundations of change were firmly prepared and established. It was also a time when people believed it was possible to live life simply, guided by the gospels, a hope far-removed from the frenetic pace of recent years.

Lavanoux himself lived simply and never earned more than \$75 a week. Two grants enabled him to see the church in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The "Editor's Diary" in each issue reflected his views and the changing church. The final number of *Liturgical Arts*, which was never printed because of unpaid bills, was titled "The Priority of Dreams," a searching issue which discussed what was possible in the church and in the world.

We stand on the shoulders of people like Maurice Lavanoux who dared to dream and to speak out about what was wrong with society, our priorities, and our tastes. Much of what he believed in has come to pass, but he would prefer not to be smug but to go on to the next project. That was life. When one died, there was change (*vita mutatur*), but after a ripple of regret or recognition the world went on, perhaps a better place for one's sojourn there. □

A.W. Godfrey lectures in classics and comparative studies at the State University of New York at Stony Brook.



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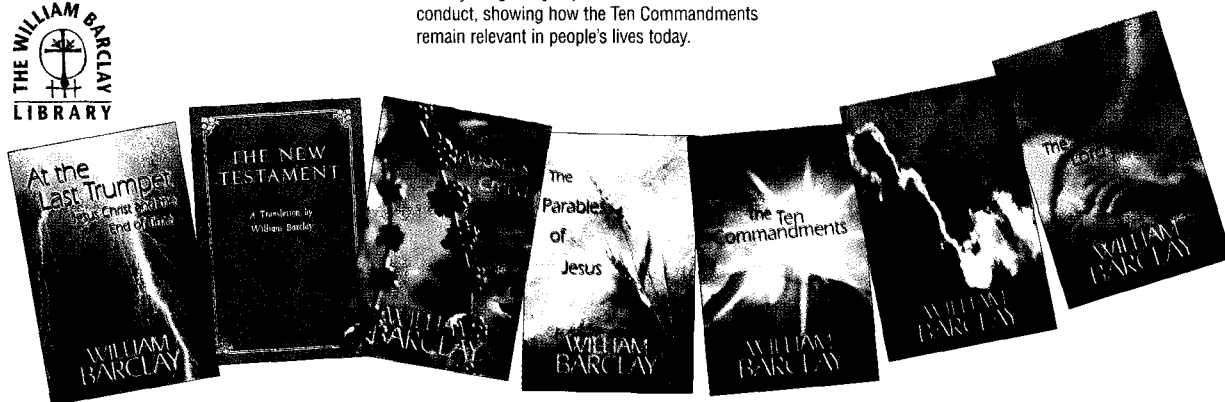
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